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Galaxy
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Fore and Aft

YOU may have noticed that GALAXY is under new ownership and wondered why a profitable magazine should have to change hands. The answer is simple, though some of the effects were not — the previous publishers, being unfamiliar with science fiction, were unable to integrate the magazine into their publishing program.

With our new ownership, a lot of things that have been wrong are going to be corrected.

Most important of all, the editorial and production standards are going to be changed *only* in the direction of improvement. For example, now that the splendid Heinlein serial has ended, we have a sparkling novella, WORLD WITHOUT CHILDREN, by Damon Knight, and, beginning in the January issue, a dazzlingly brilliant serial, THE DEMOLISHED MAN, by Alfred Bester. Either one would be worth the 35c tab, but in addition there are the fine novelets and short stories . . . and from March on, we're starting an exciting monthly feature by Willy Ley, in which he will cover significant developments in science *and answer your questions either in the department or by mail!*

Start sending your questions along to us now.

All this has disrupted schedules severely, delaying the semi-annual story ratings a full month. Here are your selections, issue by issue, for Volume 2 . . . plus my comments:

• *April*: Betelgeuse Bridge, William Tenn; Inside Earth, Poul Anderson; I, the Unspeakable, Walt Sheldon; Nice Girl with 5 Husbands, Fritz Leiber; Field Study, Peter Phillips; The Marching Morons, C. M. Kornbluth.

Many readers explained the reasons for their preferences, all personal, of course, but I wouldn't attempt to rate the stories. One good restraining factor is that *every item in the book* is to be anthologized.

• *May*: Hostess, Isaac Asimov; Ask Me Anything, Damon Knight; Bridge Crossing, Daye Dryfoos; Man of Destiny, John Christopher.

Here, too, all stories are signed up for book publication. Even the article, Africa's Mysterious Mammal by Willy Ley, will probably be included in his next volume on natural history.

• *June*: Don't live in the Past, Damon Knight; Angel's Egg, Ed-

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gar Pangborn; Hunt the Hunter, Kris Neville.

The first two are scheduled for anthologies; the third may be by the time this appears. Angel's Egg, by the way, had me worried. I liked the story tremendously, but was uncertain that readers would. They did.

• *July*: Appointment in Tomorrow, Fritz Leiber; Syndrome Johnny, Charles Dye; Common Denominator, John D. MacDonald; Venus Is a Man's World, William Tenn; Pen Pal, Milton Lesser.

All these will be in book form.

• *August*: Beyond Bedlam, Wyman Guin; The Pilot and the Bushman, Sylvia Jacobs; The Fire and the Sword, Frank M. Robinson; Operation Distress, Lester del Rey; A Little Journey, Ray Bradbury; Pictures Don't Lie, Katherine MacLean.

Of these, only Operation Distress has not been tapped for book publication, and that may be by this time. Again I took a long chance, for Beyond Bedlam had a theme that normally frightens people, and the plot was sharply divorced from the melodramatic school of writing. Reader response, however, was vast both in quantity and appreciation. This was the issue that was prematurely withdrawn from circulation, so, if you want a copy, send 35c.

• *September*: Cabin Boy, Damon Knight; If You Was a Moklin, Murray Leinster; The Sense of Wonder, Milton Lesser; What Is Posat?, Phyllis Sterling Smith; The Biography Project, Dudley Dell.

The first three and the fifth are signed up for anthologies.

I don't think serials or articles can be rated—there's no reasonable way to compare them with novelets or short stories. But in the case of The Puppet Masters by Robert A. Heinlein, the reaction was so enthusiastic that some mention of it must be made. Although the serial was not completed, most readers insisted on rating it against the three previous ones, with this result:

The Puppet Masters, Robert A. Heinlein; Mars Child, Cyril Judd; Time Quarry, Clifford D. Simak; Tyrann, Isaac Asimov.

All have appeared as books or are scheduled to, which, with our shorter fiction and most articles, means that *about 95% of the first year's issues will wind up between hard covers.* It may sound like a boast to some sensitive readers, but the fact is that *no other periodical of any kind whatever* has achieved this almost unbelievable record.

Are we proud of it? Well, what do you think? And our second year looks even better than the first.

—H. L. GOLD

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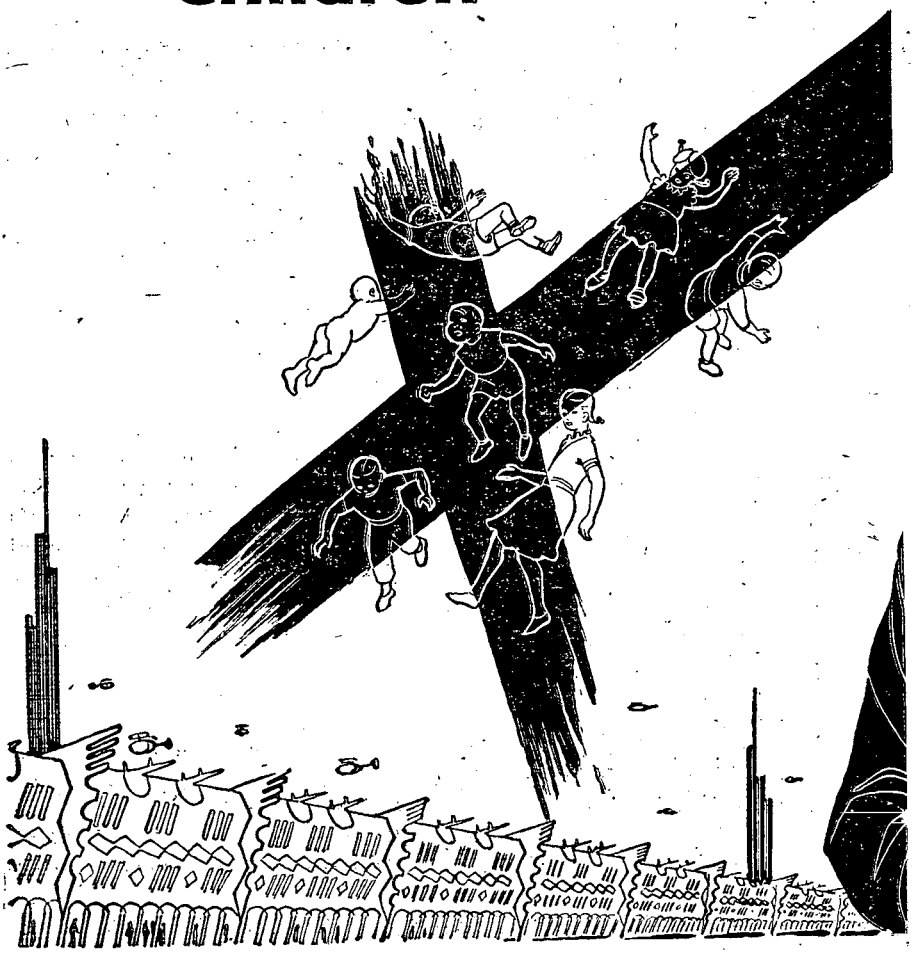
World Without Children



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By DAMON KNIGHT

Paradise on Earth would be a life without war or death or want. Agreed! But what if the price for individual survival means—no posterity allowed?

I

THE last diapers were in museums, along with teething rings, layettes, formula bottles, perambulators, rattles and teddy bears. Swings and trapezes, slides and jungle gyms had been broken up for scrap. The books, most of them, had been junked: *Baby and Child Care, Black Beauty, Obstetrics for the Millions, Tom Swift and his Rocket Glider, What Every Boy Should Know, What Every Girl Should Know, Diseases of Childhood, The Book of Knowledge, Man-*

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ners for Teeners, One Hundred Things a Boy Can Make.

The last recorded birth had been two hundred years ago.

That child—who had also been the last to wear a snowsuit, the last to cut his finger playing with knives, and the last to learn about women—had now reached the physiological age of twenty-five years, and looked even younger owing to his excellent condition. His name was George Miller; he had been a great curiosity in his day and a good many people still referred to him as The Child.

George did his best to live up to the name. Everything he did was essentially outré; everything he wore was outlandish; everything he said was outrageous. He got along better with most women than with most men. He said the sort of things to women that made them say, "Oh, *George!*" half wincing, half melting.

At the moment he was busy explaining to Lily Hoffman, head of the Human Conservation League, why he had never permanently given up drinking or smoking.

"Oh, *George,*" said Lily.

"No, really," said George earnestly. "You say having fun will take ten per cent off my life. Well, but Art Levinson tells me that my present life expectancy is probably somewhere around three thousand years. So if he's right, and you're right, my disgraceful habits won't catch up to me until 5062 A.D. and by that time I expect to be glad enough to lie down."

Lily tilted her careful blonde curls forward to avoid a drink in the hand of a wandering guest. "That's an *average,* George," she said. "And of course it's only a *guess,* because nobody who's had the longevity treatments early in life has passed away from old age yet. Now I personally believe that it's possible to live for ten thousand years or more. And, George, just suppose you did pass away in 5062 from overindulgence, and the *very next year* they found a way to extend the life-span even more!"

"Good Lord," said George, looking distressed. "That would be a laugh on me, wouldn't it?"

"*Really,* George, this is a serious—"

George put his hand on her arm. "You're right," he said, with fervor. "I might be throwing away the best centuries of my life. I'll stop this very minute." He took a beautifully chased silver cigarette case out of his breast pocket and emptied it into his hand. "If you'll excuse me," he said, rising, "I'll go and throw these in the fireplace so as not to be tempted."

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She called after him, "George, *stick* to it. That's the important thing. You've quit before, you know."

"I know," said George humbly.

Carrying the cigarettes at arm's length, as if they were a clutch of poisonous serpents, he maneuvered his slender body among the standing, sitting and perambulating guests until he reached the fireplace.

"Hello, Luther," he said to a gray-haired, comfortably plump man wearing rimless spectacles. "I'm enjoying your party." He dropped the cigarettes ceremoniously behind a charred log.

"Again?" asked Luther Wheatley amiably.

"Lily talked me into it," George told him. "You ought to try virtue some time, Luther. It gives you a sort of intense feeling, an I-am-the-master-of-my-fate kind of thing. Besides, it's an inexhaustible source of conversation. And then when you finally succumb, you have such a delightful sense of wickedness. I think everybody ought to abstain from everything once in a while, just to keep from taking it for granted."

"George," said Luther, frowning in concentration, "I believe that is the same discovery that you first announced to me when you were about twenty-three. How do you manage to—shall I say—keep your mind so fresh?"

"How do you manage to remember every damned thing I've said over the course of a hundred and fifty-odd years?" George countered irritably.

"You always say the same thing." One of Luther's cats wandered by, and Luther stooped to pick it up. It was a pretty thing, marked like a Siamese, but with long, light fur. It stared at Luther with offended dignity and made a noise in its throat.

"Haven't seen that one before, have I?" George asked.

"No. She's a distant descendant of Mimi, though—sixteen generations removed. You remember Mimi."

"I do, indeed. A great cat, Luther. You weren't worthy of her. Pity they're so short-lived, isn't it?"

"That's why I like them," Luther said, letting the cat drip from his hands like golden taffy. "People are so inconveniently permanent. . . . Art! Is that you? I thought you were in Pasadena for the season."

A stocky, owl-faced man with a shining bald pate put his hand on Wheatley's shoulder. "I flew in especially to see you, Luther," he said. "Hello, George. You, too." He shook hands with them in turn. "Can we go somewhere and talk? It's important. Is Morey here?"

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Luther peered across the room. "He's around somewhere." He stopped a man carrying a tray of cocktail glasses and said, "Find Mr. Stiles for me, will you? Tell him I'd like to see him in my study." He took the owlish man's arm and gently propelled him toward the door, leaving George to trail along. "How are you, you dog-robber? How are the famous Levinson fruit-flies?"

"How are the cats?"

"Esthetically rewarding, which is more than I can say for your noxious pets."

Luther opened the study door and ushered them in. It was an almost fanatically tidy place, like the rest of Luther's apartment. There was a small window looking out on the roof-tops of Venice; the Rio Foscari was on the opposite side of the building. There were a desk, a work table, an easy chair and two straight chairs. The walls were covered with shelves of books: mostly history and genetics, with the usual peppering of salty novels.

Two cats were in the easy chair, one in each of the straight chairs, and one asleep on the table.

"Dump them off," said Luther, setting an example and easing himself into the one comfortable chair. "You can sit on the table, George—you've got the youngest and most resilient ligaments."

A man with the long, cartilaginous face of an honest son of toil appeared in the doorway. His collar was too big and too stiff, his tie creased and askew, and his short iron-gray hair was fiercely rumpled like a eagle's nest. He looked as if he might bite, until he smiled; then he looked unexpectedly shy and friendly.

His voice was a subdued rumble: "Hello, Art. Glad to see you. What's the bad news?"

"It's bad, all right," said Levinson. His round face was serious as he bit off the end of a cigar with a quick, nervous gesture. "Shut the door, will you, Morey?"

He looked at the unlit cigar and put it down. "Listen," he said, "I could build up to this gradually and spare your nerves, but I haven't got the patience. I found out something last week that scared me to my toenails."

He stopped and glanced at each of them. They seemed impressed. George did, too, but grim seriousness always impressed him. It made him feel uncomfortable enough to want to drive it off with a facetious remark, but before he had a chance to think of one, Luther said to Levinson, "You really are upset, Art, and that's something you don't do easily." He looked just above George's head. "Are you sure we're the ones you want to tell?"

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"Now look here," George said, beginning to get angry. "I may be the youngest of you, but I'm not a kid to be—"

"I wanted George here," Levinson interrupted. "He is younger, and because of that he's inclined to be less stodgy. Also, he has more of the adventurousness of youth, and that may be damned important."

George sat back, compressing his lips and giving one emphatic nod.

"What scared you, Art?" asked Stiles.

Levinson broke the cigar with bitter abruptness. "The human race," he said bluntly, "is nine-tenths sterile."

THE others looked at him in shocked silence. George glanced around, saw that nobody else was ready to speak, and asked, "How did you find out?"

"Restocking my sperm and ova banks," said Levinson. "I've been keeping them for a good many years, you may remember. There are a lot of men and women living today who have never had children. Good stock—stock we'll need when and if the race starts breeding again, and yet any one of those people might get killed in an accident and we'd lose it. So I've been keeping up the banks, though I never thought I'd see them used for another couple of thousand years. But nine out of ten donors are now sterile."

"You checked?" asked Luther.

"Naturally. I've got samples from North and South America, from Europe, Asia, Africa. All the same. There it is — we're standing on top of the last slide down to hell."

Stiles looked puzzled. He said, "How do you know it's going to get worse, Art?"

"It's that kind of thing—a progressive change. Morphological deterioration. Sperm with two tails, three tails, no tail, or all but motionless. Ova that can't be fertilized. I've made some tentative charts. I haven't got enough data yet for accuracy, but the breakdown seems to begin in men who are physiologically at least forty and chronologically at least three hundred. In women, a little earlier. That includes damn near everybody. I'm not kidding, Morey. In five to ten years more, there won't be enough viable stock left to start the human race again."

"Have you got any idea what's causing it, Art?" George asked.

"Only the obvious one — it's just one more side effect of longevity. You know that in gross terms what the treatments do is to slow down your catabolic rate. In about fifty years, in other words, you age about as much as

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you would naturally in one year. At first it was thought that that was all the treatments did, but we know better now. We have the expected increase in 'diseases of the aged'—kidneys, heart, liver, arteriosclerosis, calcium deposits and so on—but we also have a rash of things nobody figured on. Cancer, for instance, came close to wiping out the race until they licked it at the Gandhi Center about two hundred years ago. Then there's an unexpected drop in resistance to respiratory infections along about age-of-record 250. And now this."

"What have you done about it?" asked Stiles. "You talk to anybody in the government?"

"Sure." Levinson picked up a fresh cigar and bit into it savagely. "I talked to Van Dam, the Public Health Commissioner, after sitting around his office for three days, and he took it up with President Golightly. He brought me back Golightly's answer. Here it is."

He took a folded piece of paper out of his vest pocket.

"'Thank you for your interesting report, which I am turning over to the appropriate department for further study. In reply to your question, resumption of wholesale breeding at this time would be prejudicial to world peace and security, and no such measure will be entertained until all other avenues have been exhausted.'"

He stuffed the note back into his pocket.

"What about those other avenues, Art?" asked Stiles.

"Nonexistent. There is no known cure for morphological sterility in men or women, and not even a promising line of research. We've got to start breeding, that's all. No way out of it. But that trained-seal department of Golightly's will kick the problem around for ten, twenty, fifty years. By that time we might as well start carving our own monuments. *Prejudicial to world peace and security,*" he added bitterly.

Stiles scratched his ear, looking mournful. "It *would* kick up kind of a rumpus, Art," he said, "He's right there."

Levinson turned on him. "Try to see a little further than your own union for once, Morey. Would you let the whole blasted race die just to preserve the shortage of masons?"

"'Tain't only that," said Stiles, unruffled. "We'd be ready for another war as soon as the population got big enough, for one thing."

"Let's have a couple of more voices here," said Levinson. "Luther, any comment?"

Luther sighed. "Shall I get out my checkbook now, Art, or do you want me to wait until I've

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liquidated some of my holdings?"

Levinson shrugged at him. "It's going to cost you, all right," he agreed. "All three of you. We'll need about three hundred thousand credits to start. More later."

"Much more, Art?" Luther queried.

"Plenty. We've got to set up at least half a dozen birth centers, each equipped to handle upward of a thousand children and meet all their needs, if necessary, over a twenty-year period. We'll build the centers, or buy and adapt them. They've got to be in out-of-the-way places and adequately camouflaged to fool the Security Police. We've got to staff them, service them, arrange for protection—and we've got to do it *fast*." He looked at each of them in turn. "I know that all three of you are worth several million apiece. I may want all of it before we're through."

There was a short silence. Then Stiles coughed and looked apologetic. "Let's just clear up a few points, Art. One thing, it seems to me that this cloak-and-dagger stuff is unnecessary. Why not take it to the people? Force the Golightly gang to repeal the birth prohibition?"

Levinson said, "You've done some publicity, Morey. How long do you think it would take to put such a program over, on a world-wide scale?"

Stiles frowned. "A year, maybe . . ." He winced comically. "All right, all right, I know what you're going to say. It would take Golightly just about twenty-four hours to throw us all in pokey. I was just stalling on that one, I guess. But here's another thing, Art. As I get it, you're figuring on six thousand kids or more in the first generation. Why so many?"

"Simply because I'm afraid we won't be able to do much better. If we could manage a million, we still couldn't save all the useful strains that are still viable. It's like this, Morey: Suppose there are only five men and five women in the world. Each one has some quality that the others don't in his heredity. One has mechanical ingenuity, another one leadership, another one artistic imagination, and so on. If one of those couples fails to reproduce, there are two qualities gone forever. Multiply that by a billion and there's our problem."

He waved his cigar at Stiles's nose. "Don't forget, we're down to ten per cent of our stock already. The best we can hope to do is to patch together some kind of crude imitation of the human race, and hope it will work. If we manage to save *homo sap* at all, we'll be damned lucky."

Stiles leaned forward, elbows on knees, and laced his big fingers

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together. "Art, I don't know—" he said slowly.

George, who was facing the door, saw it open a crack. He said quietly, "We have visitors."

As the others turned, the door swung open all the way. A woman with coppery hair piled around the merest sketch or suggestion of a hat was leaning into the room with her slender hand on the doorknob. George caught a glimpse of someone standing behind her, and then, smiling brilliantly, she was advancing toward them like a minor natural catastrophe.

"*There* you all are," she said happily. "Hiding! Did you think I wasn't coming, Luther? Art, when did you get into town? Why didn't you call me? Morey, you're looking as eatable as ever. George, *darling*," she finished, and patted him on the cheek.

The four of them were standing, even Luther, who normally made getting out of a chair a ceremony. George found his heart going at an unusual rate. Glancing at the others, he conjectured that they all felt the same symptoms as far as the state of their arteries would permit. Luther and Art were beaming, and Morey's grin was a little more shy than usual. Hilda Place affected men like that—all men, as far as George had been able to discover.

She had enormous brilliant eyes, with faint bluish shadows under them, the eyes of a mature and knowing woman; but her lips had the softness of youth. Her slender body was covered from throat to wrist and calf by her dark green dress. Hilda preferred not to expose herself in public; she had never worn the showcase gowns that were currently fashionable.

Accepting their greetings, she gave each of them a kiss on the cheek. All except George. While he was still telling himself that it was absurd for this to matter so much to him, she had turned and brought a stranger into the group.

"I want you all to meet Joseph Krueger," she said gaily. "He's the most fascinating man in the world, and I want everybody to remember that I discovered him. Gentlemen, this is the Man From the Past!"

The Man From the Past looked as young as George; he was well set up, but had a curious awkwardness about him, a coltish uncertainty. He had a large chin, mild eyes behind dark-rimmed spectacles, and an engaging smile. George, despite a stab of jealousy, decided that he liked him.

"I'm not a time traveler or anything," Krueger was saying. "That's only Miss Place's exaggeration. I'm an amnesiac, they

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tell me. I found myself standing on a street corner in Vienna two weeks ago, and the last thing I remember before that was having a drink in Wichita, Kansas, in December, 1953. So I'm amusingly ignorant, as Miss Place puts it."

"Astonishing," said Levinson.

"Isn't it?" said Hilda delightedly. Her parted lips were moist. "This is all new to him. He drinks it in like a man from Mars — about the world government, and what happened to New York, and G-string parties—"

"And people hundreds of years old," Krueger put in. "That, mostly."

Levinson was still pursuing his own thought. "You lived under amnesia for better than three centuries, then," he said. "That must be a record. You have no idea what you were doing all that time, I suppose?"

Krueger shook his head. "No, sir. I've made inquiries, of course, but there was nothing in my pockets that gave any clue, and apparently I didn't live in Vienna; I couldn't find anybody who knew me there. Actually, I don't mind very much—I feel like what Miss Place calls me, the Man From the Past. I'm having a time just trying to catch up."

"We've been to see the Peace Monument, and Chico's, and the Doges' Palace—"

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"And the pretty girls on the Lido," added Krueger, widening his grin.

"—and we're still not half done. I'm exhausted," Hilda said. "And I've got to disappear for a few weeks on business, so I hope some of you will find time to show Joseph the sights. Not you, Luther. I know you never go out. And, Art, I suppose you're running back to your fruit-flies. But Morey? Or George?"

Krueger looked uncomfortable. "I don't want to be any bother."

"Not at all," said George sympathetically. "You're a novelty, you know, and that's a rare thing after the first hundred years or so. Have you got any notion where you'd like to go next, or is it all too new?"

"Too new, I'm afraid. But any place I haven't seen yet would be fine with me, as long as I'm no trouble."

"I'll work out an itinerary and call you," said George. "Let me have your address and number."

LUTHER said, "Meanwhile, shall we go mingle with the populace? I've got to, anyway. Some of them would probably recognize me if they saw me and will be hurt if they don't." He offered his arm to Hilda and they started out. He turned at the door to ask Levinson, "You're staying the night at least, aren't you, Art? Good. We'll all get together again a little later."

George exchanged a few more words with Krueger, introduced him to three beautiful women, and wandered off looking for Hilda.

He found her in the middle of a tight group near the end of the room where dancing was being attempted to the strains of Luther's music-library outlet, and wormed his way in to her.

"Dance with me?" he asked hopefully.

"Of *course*, George," she said, and a reluctant lane opened for them. Then her lithe warm body was in his arms, and the ridiculous gilded feathers on her hat were tickling his ear.

"I rather like your Joe," he said.

"I'm glad. Isn't he delicious?" Her breath warmed the side of his neck.

"Haven't kissed him," said George. "I'll have to take your word for it."

Somehow, without seeming to withdraw deliberately, she no longer was quite so close to him.

"Sorry," he said. "That slipped."

"I didn't like it," she told him, "but I think I'll forgive you, because I like you so much. Actually, though, you're wrong. Joseph is one man I'm absolutely certain I shall never have an affair with."

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"That's not much comfort," George said grumpily. "It seems to make two of us—Joseph and me."

She smiled up at him. "As if it matters, darling. There are so many women in the world."

"But it's you I want."

"For the moment."

HE stared in astonishment at her softly laughing eyes. "Well, good Lord, you don't think it should be forever, do you? I mean monogamy was all very well for a short-lived human race, but—"

"Don't be silly, George. Nobody could stand one mate for what may be centuries or even more. It's a horrifying thought."

"Then what are you trying to tell me?" he challenged.

"I'm very fond of you; you know that. And I'm very pleased and flattered that you want me."

"Then why not—"

She seemed almost embarrassed. "I don't know just how to put it, darling. If it's just me you want, when there are so many other women, then it's an obsession and you ought to see an analyst."

"But I said it wasn't that. Really, Hilda, this is all very damaging to my self-esteem. I'm not sure I want to know your objection to me, but I'm afraid I must. What is it?"

She turned still pinker and looked away. "It's idiotic, George. You probably won't understand it; I don't think I do, myself." She turned her face up defiantly. "I feel—motherly toward you."

"*Motherly?*" he repeated, stunned. "But that's nonsense! You wouldn't know how a mother feels! None of us would—I mean women, of course — any more than I know what it's like to feel *fatherly*."

"But I'm so much older than you."

"Well, who isn't?"

"You see, I said you wouldn't understand," she answered sadly, then tugged his arm with sudden desperate gaiety toward the bar. "Let's forget all this sociological argument, George. I want a drink."

So did he, George realized.

II

SUNLIGHT, divided by the prism high in the arched ceiling, struck full on the paintings that lined either side of the long, curving gallery, and left the center, the moving strip with its divans, its cafe tables and chairs, in a soft, restful gloom.

"Here we come around again," said George. "Another of the same?"

Joe Krueger looked at his

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empty glass. "Yes, but this round's mine. You've been paying for everything."

"That will complicate things, though," objected George. "Tell you what. You can buy our tickets to the shadow plays tonight."

As they approached the checker in his little booth, George took the green disk with the tab that said TOM COLLINS and the orange and white one that said SCOTCH/SODA and stuck them into the clip on the table's center pole.

Around the center pole were four illuminated plastic cylinders which reeled off the names of the paintings as they passed. PICASSO, they were saying, MASK AND BONES, OIL ON CANVAS, 2073. TSCHELETCHEW, FLIGHT FORMS #6, INK AND CRAYON, 2105. SHAHN, INCUBATORS, OIL ON CANVAS.

"I'd like to see more of his," said Joe, looking at the Shahn. "His stuff seems more vital than most, somehow. More—" He hunted for a word, gave it up with his usual embarrassed shrug.

"He's younger," said George. "Picasso, Tscheletchew and all that bunch were old men when the longevity treatment came in. They're still turning out the same thing, pretty much, that they were doing three centuries ago. It does get tiresome, I admit, but who's interested in art when there are other things to do and see? We've gone a long way in more important directions, if you ask me."

"Oh, yes," said Joe emphatically.

"Besides, the Culture Commissioner tells them what to turn out. Works fine for everybody."

The serving station came around. The white-jacketed waiter stepped neatly aboard, smiled, deposited their drinks, and stepped off again. The cylinders announced, RENOIR, BAIGNEUSE, OIL ON CANVAS, 1888.

George stirred his drink moodily. Joe was now watching the paintings attentively, and he felt free to let his thoughts wander. After Hilda had gone home last night — not with George, worse luck! — the four of them had gathered in the study again for a council of war. This time it had been Morey Stiles who had led the discussion. He had pointed out that the project couldn't possibly be managed on a small scale, that in spite of the danger they had to have an organization. He was right, of course; after all, they'd need an enormous staff who would have to know what was going on, not to mention the several thousands of women who would have to be persuaded to give birth.

Luther, warming to the problem, had been all for secret meetings in basements, and an elab-

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orate organization based on the ancient Communist system. He had been voted down. The plan, as they finally evolved it, centered around doctors—specialists in women's complaints, for preference—who were to be recruited and sworn in by Levinson. It would be their job to test their patients for fertility, carefully sound out the pick of the lot, and recruit them in turn. Meanwhile Morey, as the team's best administrator, would be drawing up plans for the birth centers, inspecting locations, bribing officials, and so on. Luther, who had the widest acquaintance among monied men, would scout for more capital.

There had seemed to be nothing left for George to do but to pony up when required and to keep his mouth shut. Levinson had told him, however, that there would ultimately have to be a somewhat risky attempt to reach the public, and George, because of his youth and daring, would be very valuable in that phase of the conspiracy. When? Levinson didn't know.

And Hilda, who had only just got into town, was off again to some mysterious destination for an unspecified length of time.

Anyhow, he had Joe to feel superior to; he ought to be grateful for that. He felt mildly ashamed of himself when he glanced at the man and saw the eagerness in his face. Perhaps that was the answer to the question of ennui, he thought—get yourself knocked on the head, or have your memories surgically excised somehow, and start all over again.

That wasn't such a foolish idea as it might seem, he told himself. After all, nobody knew yet what real longevity was like; nobody was older than three or four centuries. What would happen when they were all three thousand or more?

There was plenty of time to worry about it, at least.

He said, "I'm sorry, I wasn't listening."

Joe repeated, "I've been reading histories like mad, but I can't seem to take it all in. Things are so much the same, in some ways, and yet so different." He shook his head. "I suppose I'm trying to get it too fast."

"Well, there isn't exactly any rush," said George cheerfully. "Anything in particular bothering you?"

"No children, chiefly, I guess. It's hard for me to understand how that could possibly be enforced. In my day, population was always increasing to meet the available food supply; it was supposed to be some kind of natural law. And now you've stopped it cold."

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"Had to," said George. "You see, the fellows who perfected the longevity techniques published their work, and the newspapers took it up, and the thing got completely out of control in the next fifty years. Normal birth rate—higher, as a matter of fact—and the death rate way down. That was the time of the big blowup—famines, riots, and the Last War on top of it. When we came out of that, we had three things: longevity, a strong world government, and a greatly improved birth control technique. Those pills, you know, that everybody has to take.

"Well, what else was there to do? They had to cut down the birth rate, at least, or in a century or so we would have been standing on each other's shoulders. And *that* would have been unenforceable, you know — restricted breeding. You can't tell anybody that he's not as fit as the next man to have children. So they stopped it altogether, made childbirth a capital crime. As a result, the total population has shrunk a good deal in the last three hundred years, but we're still over what's regarded as the optimum figure. Or so they say."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, restricted breeding is an awfully hot potato. We'll have to come to it eventually, but I don't think anybody in the government is happy about the prospect. If we started reproducing in any quantity, the whole economic balance would be upset. Tremendously complicated problem. I don't know enough about it to explain to you properly."

"I should think it would be particularly hard on the women," said Joe thoughtfully.

"Well, there were a lot of people, men and women both, who couldn't adjust to longevity itself, let alone the other problems. In the first century after the war, I understand suicide accounted for something like fifteen per cent of the death rate. Looking at it from one angle, that was a good thing for the race. I mean to say, if a person has any fundamental instability, it's going to come out in two centuries or less. And people for whom there simply wasn't any room in the society. Without children consuming and not producing, you know, our production rate is enormously higher. There was a lot of unemployment, too, in that first century. Some starvation, I'm afraid. And crime waves. But that's all settled down now, and as you see we have a very stable setup, and a high living standard. That's why it's going to be so difficult to change when we have to."

"Umm," said Joe, seriously.

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It occurred to George that he had been talking rather seriously himself, not exactly the best line to take for a man with knowledge he was supposed to conceal. He smiled cheerfully and said, "But I don't think anybody should work up an ulcer over it just yet. You can generally lick a problem if you have a few thousand years to mull it over."

Joe nodded enthusiastically. "That's one of the things that awes me, whenever I think about it. In the old days—I mean, in my day—" He shook his head. "I keep getting my terms of reference mixed up. Anyhow, it used to be that a man could learn enough to do what he wanted to do by the time he was thirty, and then his life was half done. Now—" He looked baffled. "It's hard to take in. Tell me, Miss Place said something about rocket flights to the stars—?"

"Oh, yes. They got to the Moon in 1954. That must have been a year or two after you blanked out. Mars in 1961, I think it was, and Venus the year after. Moons of Jupiter in 1969. All uninhabitable, of course."

"Yes, but I meant *interstellar* flights?"

"JUST one. Alpha Centauri, along about the turn of the century. The trip took something like six years each way, I understand. They found a very Earth-like planet, and I believe there's some talk of putting a small colony there."

"Lord!" said Joe Krueger. "But—all this time, and they haven't done anything more about it?"

"Well, it's really a hobbyist's kind of thing," said George thoughtfully. "A good many people, with more time and more capital to play with, have turned to space-flight who wouldn't have been much involved with it before. But it hasn't any economic base, you see. No really urgent reason for anyone to tackle it."

"That's what I don't get," said Joe, creasing his brow into an anxious frown. "Wouldn't it solve the problem we were just talking about?"

"It might, at that," said George, trying valiantly to see the question from the other man's viewpoint. "But it hasn't come to that yet, and probably won't for a good long time. As things stand, human life is a very precious thing, much more than it was even in the Western countries in your day. That's understandable, isn't it? It's like betting at roulette—if you haven't got much to lose, you may as well risk it all; but if you've got a lot, you're a fool to gamble it away. So that's one reason we don't have war—another argument against breeding that I forgot to mention—and

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we play a good deal of tennis and squash and so on, but no football; and we're not anxious to risk our necks on exploring expeditions. You had something in mind like the colonization of the Amazon basin and so on, didn't you?"

Joe nodded. "All habitable areas."

"Not the same thing, though—we have no population pressure, no economic pressure. Things are good here for everybody. Why should anybody want to leave? There's more room in the Americas, but I like Europe and who needs more room just for himself?"

Joe grinned wryly. "I see it—in theory, anyhow. But I'm damned if I feel that way about it. Me, I'd like to go."

"I'll see if I can wangle an introduction to Clarke, the Rocket Society high lama. Luther knows him, I think."

Joe was saying, "That would be wonderful," when George's wrist phone buzzed. He said, "Excuse me," and swiveled the disk into his palm so that the receiver covered his ear and the transmitter pickup touched his throat, making eavesdropping impossible.

"George Miller," he said.

"George, this is Art Levinson," said the tiny voice rapidly. "I'm about to be arrested by the Security Police. I tried to reach the others, but they're both out of phone range."

"The Security—that's impossible," George protested. "We haven't done a thing. They *couldn't* know!"

"I told you I spoke to Van Dam, the Public Health Commissioner," said the voice impatiently. "He must have figured I'd do something about the sterility situation, so he evidently had my rooms wired and put a detail of police on my trail. Everything we said in our conference must be on official tapes."

"Good God!" George exclaimed. "Then we're all in danger!"

"Of course. Don't tell me you haven't got anybody trailing you."

George glanced around apprehensively. Everybody suddenly looked suspicious, but there was no one he could specifically identify as a Security Policeman.

"I don't know," he said. "Where are you?"

"In Luther's bedroom. I locked myself in. They're trying to break the door down. Good-by, George. Just pass the word along. That's all you can—"

"Hold on! How long can you keep them out of there?"

"Another few minutes, if that. Don't try to do anything foolish, George. There's another of them

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in a 'copter outside the bedroom window. Just tell—"

"Wait!" said George excitedly. "Hold them off as long as you can. Throw a fit. Do anything." He broke the contact and said to Joe's astonished face, "Something urgent. Pay the check for me, will you? I'll call you later."

He fumbled a bill out of his wallet, stood up and leaped off the moving strip, dashing past indignant patrons of the arts to the roof exit.

Thoughts blurred in his head. He didn't know what he could do, but he intended to do something. He couldn't let Levinson stand off the police by himself. The excitement was somehow pleasant—the adrenalin squirting through his veins, his chest filling massively with air, his shoulders knotting with the expectation of a fight. It was astonishing. He couldn't think of anyone who wouldn't avoid danger at absolutely any cost; with his conditioning, it was hard to believe that he was being so foolhardy.

Yet George felt rather proud of himself. He'd wondered why Levinson had included him in the original tiny group of conspirators, had resignedly assumed it was actually because of his money. Now he knew at least part of the reason and respected Levinson's shrewdness.

He was, he thought quickly, about two minutes away from Luther's apartment by air—if he could get a cab.

The roof was crowded with private 'copters, and for a moment George debated the idea of stealing one. Impossible. They were all stowed in parking clips, and he couldn't get one out past the attendant anyhow, even if some fool had left his keys in the dashboard console. He ran on, reaching the cab section just in time to see a red-and-green 'copter lifting away. He thought it was empty, but he couldn't be sure.

He shouted futilely, then swung his wrist-radio out, dialed it to "Directional" and sighted carefully at the rising 'copter. After a long moment the instrument clicked and said, "Signor?" The cab steadied and hovered.

"Down here," said George. "Where you just came from—the Modern Museum." Apparently he had lost the contact, for the 'copter hung annoyingly where it was. Then he could see the tiny dot that was the driver's head. He waved madly, and in a moment the cab settled back to the landing stage.

George piled in and said, "Get up—*quick*." As the 'copter lifted again, the driver's mustachioed face turned to regard him quizzically. He said, "The Penaldo Building on the Rio S. Polo. You

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know the place I mean?"

"Surely, signor."

"Then hurry, will you?" George waved a hundred-lira note, on second thought added another. The driver's eyebrows went up the merest trifle; philosophically, he headed the machine into the northbound traffic level and fed power to the rotors.

George looked anxiously at his phone. He didn't have Art's call number, worse luck. But if they had already broken down the door when he got there, he'd know soon enough. He forced himself to relax, then exploded into motion the next instant as the cab settled on the Penaldo Building's roof. He thrust the money at the driver, shouted, "Good work, thanks!" and ran across the roof to the canal-side parapet.

He looked back once to make sure that the cab had taken off, then peered cautiously over the parapet. There was the police 'copter, sure enough, hovering outside the window of Luther's top-floor bedroom. Underneath, five stories down, a white gondola was rocking in the surge of a small power boat. The gondolier's ancient automatic curses drifted faintly up to him.

Now what? He had had a vague notion that if he could eliminate the 'copter somehow, he could get Art out through the window before the other Security men broke in. But eliminating the 'copter looked tough now, if not impossible.

He risked another look. There was only one man in the 'copter; that was a point in his favor, though he wasn't sure how. But just to begin with, he couldn't attract the man's attention by shouting; he'd never be heard over the noise of the 'copters rotors. And he couldn't very well show himself. As for the phone—

Wait a minute! The police would almost certainly be talking to each other by phone; in fact, he was positive of it. And these small transmitters didn't reproduce intonations very well. It could work. Anyway—

George aimed the phone carefully at the man in the 'copter and said briskly, "On the roof! Quick!" Then he ducked out of the man's visual range and watched the rotor blades. When they began to rise, he leaped away from the parapet and got behind the stairway entrance.

The door was open, and George could hear muffled banging sounds down the corridor. Good for Art, he thought abstractedly; he must have piled furniture against the door.

He looked around the corner of the entrance and saw the 'copter's tail level with the parapet. Instantly he faced the other way,

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put his palm against the door frame and shoved himself violently backward.

He toppled out into view, legs going furiously to try to keep his balance; then he let himself go and landed with a bone-crushing thump on the hard roof. He scrambled to his feet again, drew an imaginary knife from his jacket, and lunged back behind the entrance.

There was a thump as the 'copter landed on the roof, and then footsteps pounded toward him. George ducked around the opposite side of the entrance and ran silently, on the balls of his feet, completely around to the blind side again.

The policeman, a depressingly burly young man in pearl-gray jacket and shorts, was leaning half into the doorway, listening to the sounds from down the hall. Without hesitation, George launched himself at his back.

They tottered a moment. Then the policeman's grip was torn away and they plunged together down the stairs. They landed with a jar that shook George from skull to knees. He sorted himself out and saw that the young policeman was also getting up, with a dazed expression on his face. George hit him on the point of the jaw, as hard as he could. The policeman collapsed and slid down another four steps.

Panting, George slid down beside him and took his gun. He could still hear the pounding down the hall. Evidently the others hadn't heard the crash when they came down the stairs, though it had sounded loud enough to wake a regiment.

George hit the recumbent policeman thoughtfully behind the ear with the butt of his gun. He would have liked to get him out of the way, but strongly doubted his own ability to lug that steak-fed hulk any distance. He went back up the stairs, past the idling 'copter, to the parapet again.

It was a good fifteen feet down to the window and no way to get there. He couldn't take the 'copter down and simply invite Art to climb in; the rotor blades wouldn't have enough clearance.

Swearing to himself, George ran back to the 'copter and rummaged inside it. In a locker just forward of the door, he found a rope ladder. But it took him what seemed like five anguished minutes to locate the hooks—diabolically hidden over the door inside the cab—which were designed to support it.

He climbed in and took the 'copter up, past the parapet and over, dangerously close, letting the ladder dangle against the window. For another agonizing interval, nothing happened. George was about to haul the

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ladder up again and tie a wrench to it, when the window suddenly swung open and Art's red, wild-eyed face appeared.

George leaned out and gestured wildly. Art nodded, grasped the ladder, and swung precariously out into space.

George hovered carefully until Art was halfway in. Then he took the 'copter up and away in a wild swoop that nearly made Art fall out again.

Art closed the door and jackknifed himself into the tiny space to right of the pilot's seat. When he got his breath back; he said, "Thanks."

"Don't mention it," said George. "Did they want you very badly, Art?"

"Afraid so. Didn't give them a chance to tell me. Ducked into the bedroom and locked the door when I saw them." He took a deep breath and smiled. "Where to now?"

George felt an unexpected glow of satisfaction. Imagine anyone asking *him*-what to do next!

"I'm looking for an empty landing stage," he said. "We'll ditch the 'copter there, and then get ourselves as thoroughly lost as we can."

III

THEY left the 'copter on the roof of a theater building and stopped at the nearest public phone booth to try to reach Luther and Morey. Both were still out of range. Then they went looking for a suitable hiding place for Art.

In Venice—in any modern city—there were a million places to get very thoroughly lost. There were discreet apartment houses, residence hotels, 'copter courts—and there were the vice houses. George, knowing Art's staid habits, chose one of the latter. The police would also know Art and might not look there.

For the benefit of those with scruples or reputations, entrance to the house was by way of a series of little cubicles lining one side of an arcade. The other side was rented to a group of second-rate but bona fide shops. Having inspected the merchandise displayed there and assured himself that no acquaintances were lurking in the corridor, a prospective client could simply step across into the nearest vacant cubicle and shut the door. Inside, a polite voice from a wall speaker asked to be allowed to learn your wishes, registered you under any name you chose to give, and allotted you a room, a suite, a wing or a floor according to your wishes and your pocketbook.

George, speaking German with a thick and slightly drunken Munschener accent, affected hesitation and asked for a resumé of

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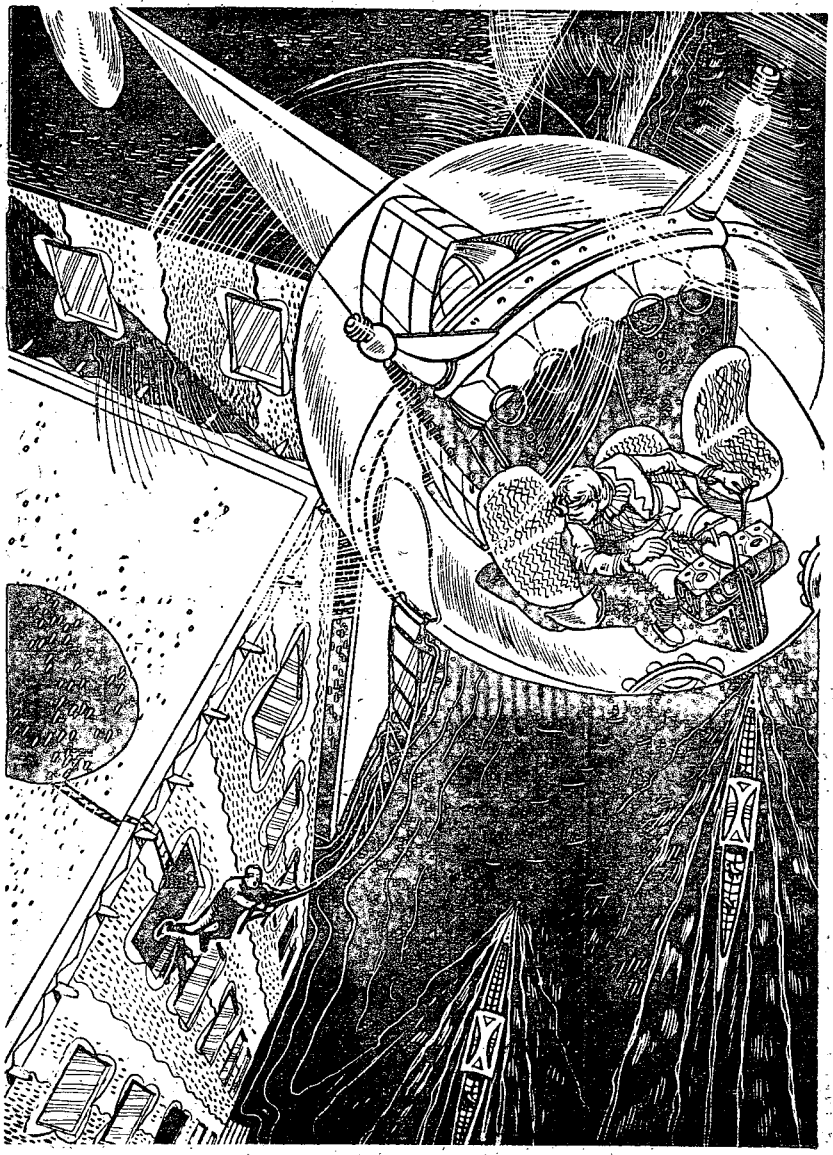

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the house's attractions. The invisible clerk immediately switched to impeccable Low German and suggested, "The Herren would possibly like to inspect the ladies in one of the private salons before making a choice? Or perhaps one of the theaters first? Or if the Herren require any stimulation—?" He proceeded to describe some of the entertainments now being offered in the theaters, and to name the various species of stimulants that were available to clients.

"No," said George fuzzily. "Later, later. We are already too drunk. Give us just a room—no, a suite. The best."

"Certainly. Sixty lira, please." George put the notes into the slot in the counter. A receipt and two door keys popped out, and the right wall of the cubicle rolled back to reveal a tiny self-service elevator. "Suite C 35," said the clerk. "Turn right when you leave the elevator."

The suite was eminently comfortable: three bedrooms, two baths, living room, game room, and even a tiny gymnasium; but Art grumbled. "Dammit, George, I suppose I shouldn't complain when you've just saved my neck, but I can't see your sense of humor. Anyway, what are these people going to think when I keep staying here but don't have any women up?"

"Probably think we're queer," George suggested. Then, as Art seemed about to explode, he added hastily. "It'll be good for you, Art — teach you humility and not condemning your fellow man and so forth. Anyhow, you've got to admit it's safe."

"All right," said Art, brushing the subject aside. "Listen, do you have any idea where Luther and Morey might be, or when they're due back?"

"Not the faintest," George admitted. "Luther has his cat farm up near Turino—he might have gone there—but he might just as easily have run over to Praha or even Wembley for a couple of days. Morey might have gone back to North America—I hope so—but in any case I don't see how we can risk a 'gram without giving the whole show away."

"No," agreed Art. He scowled and bit his lip. "Just the same, we've got to locate them. I have a hunch the S. P. is just as anxious to find them as we are."

George lifted one eyebrow. "You think they're clairvoyant?"

"No. I think that up till an hour ago, Golightly's crowd took me just seriously enough to want me out of the way. But since you've pulled that television-serial act with the 'copter, I'm willing to bet that they're seriously alarmed. I told you they must have our meeting on tape,

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so they'll know Luther and Morey are involved. You, too, of course."

George sat down on the edge of a large, circular divan, upholstered in aphrodisia red. He said thoughtfully, "Well, what do we do? If we all run, then we'll just be advertising our whereabouts, won't we?"

Art nodded grimly. "But if the S. P. gets hold of any of the four of us, I wouldn't give much for our chances of seeing daylight again."

George stared at him. "I suppose I'm naive, but it seems to me that you're implying they'll use illegal methods—truth serum and so on."

"I think they will," Art said positively. "George, you were born into this society, so I wouldn't expect you to realize, emotionally, just how unstable it really is. You've read about the series of religious wars that followed the big blowup, and the Asian massacres, but I suppose it's never occurred to you that that kind of thing could happen again. It could, and nobody knows it better than Golightly. By education and technology and, let's face it, by the execution of everybody who really objected, this planet has been forced to keep its birth-rate at zero. But the urge to reproduce, next to the survival instinct, is one of the strongest forces in nature. Tilt the balance of control just enough, and Golightly's government would go over like a house of cards. And just incidentally, Golightly is about as paranoid as you can get without being locked up. I know the man. He'll do *anything* to keep himself in the driver's seat."

George felt himself going a trifle pale. He said, "In that case, I suppose I'd better get busy. I'll call every place they could possibly be. You stay here, Art. I'll come back and report as soon as I can."

He found a public booth in the concourse nearby, and spent an expensive twenty minutes trying to locate Morey at his headquarters in Des Moines, and Luther at Turino, Praha, Wembley and points in between.

Gloomily, he called Art at the vice house, using the name he had given in registering. "No luck so far," he said in German. "See here, have you looked at the fax or the video newscasts?"

"Yes. Nothing of interest there."

"Do you think they may have been found already?"

"It's possible," said Art's earnest voice, "but I think it's unlikely. Anyone like those two is terribly hard to track down at a moment's notice, as you are finding out. If we can get them

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within the next few hours, I think we'll be in time. Keep trying."

George rang off and sat thinking for a moment. Actually, the possible number of places where either Luther or Morey might be at this moment included everything within a day's flight from Venice, meaning the major part of Earth's surface. If he kept on calling relay stations at random, it might easily take him days to hit the right one. There had to be a quicker way.

How about the agony columns in the Telefax papers? George considered the probable cost briefly, and whistled softly to himself. Another difficulty was that it would mean showing his hand; the S. P. would almost certainly see the messages, whether Luther and Morey did or not. But he could think of no other answer.

He plucked a doodle-sheet from the pad fixed to the wall of the booth, and set down a rough draft of the message. Dissatisfied, he scratched it out and tried again. After six attempts, he had:

> WORLD FATHERS OF VERMONT AND LOUISIANA: Serious charges have been leveled against revered Father Owl of California. Abandon your worldly identities immediately and fly to consult with your brethren. The meeting will assemble in the place of the Drowned Insect.

It sounded silly enough, he hoped, to pass as an ordinary notice intended for one of the innumerable crackpot sects which had sprung up after the power of the organized churches had been crushed. He couldn't make it more specific, but he hoped "Vermont and Louisiana" would serve to attract Luther's and Morey's attention—the name of a man's home state will usually stand out from a page of type almost as well as his own name — and "World Fathers" and "Father Owl of California" would make the identification certain.

The last line was a long shot. He had to indicate a meeting place without naming it; "the place of the Drowned Insect" was a restaurant in Venice where the three of them, a few years before, had been served a tureen of soup with a dead cockroach floating in the center of it. Also, he had to tell them to assume false names, and if possible get across the idea that they were to disguise themselves. Here again, he couldn't be too explicit; "abandon your worldly identities" was the best he could think of.

When he read it over, it seemed like a forlorn hope either that the two men would see the notice or that they would read it correctly. But he took the slidewalk down to the nearest fax agency and fed the message into a machine,

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adding the code numbers for all the local papers served by the Mediterranean Agency, which covered southern and eastern Europe, part of what had once been the Soviet Union and most of North Africa.

The cost was approximately two hundred times the amount of cash he was carrying, and this worried him until he reflected that he was undoubtedly on the S. P. list, if Art was right; there was no point in trying to conceal his tracks. He wrote a check and fed it into the machine.

While he waited for its acknowledgment, he set up the same message on another machine and coded it for the PanAmerican Syndicate. He went through the same procedure twice more, once for the North Atlantic Agency and once for the All-Asia Syndicate.

When he was finished, his Venetian bank account was in a state of near collapse.

The bank itself was only a few blocks away, near the Rialto bridge. As an afterthought, he went there and closed out his account, pocketing the cash. It had occurred to him that, again supposing that Art was right, the government would very likely impound their property. He wished he had included a suggestion of this kind in the message to Luther and Morey, but it was too late to worry about it.

He went back to the vice house, conferred with Art, and then took himself to "the Place of the Drowned Insect."

The restaurant was an old-fashioned one, catering to those who liked human service well enough to pay the almost astronomical prices imposed by the waiters' salaries. At that, George noticed, the place was understaffed. In another century or so, he supposed, nobody would be able to hire any kind of servant for less than a division chief's pay.

He found an inconspicuous table at the rear, ordered minestrone and spaghetti marinara, and waited. When the spaghetti gave out, he ordered a half bottle of claret. He made the wine last as long as he could, then bought a newspaper at the fax machine across the room and ordered another half-bottle.

He checked to make sure his ad had been entered properly, read the paper through, and then, through sheer boredom, read it completely through again. He was beginning to feel awash with wine, and the waiter was glancing at him with obvious irritation each time he passed. George caught his eye and ordered a pastry and coffee. When that was gone, he ordered more coffee. Then he went back to wine.

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Eventually it became impossible to think of taking another sip of the stuff. George sat and stared glassily at the half-empty bottle, wondering why he had not had the God-given sense to make the meeting place a library, or an opium den, or anything at all except a restaurant.

"Came as soon as I could," said Luther's voice. "What's up?"

George looked around with enormous relief to see the little man easing into the chair opposite.

"Luther!" he said. "I couldn't be gladder to see you!" He smothered a belch. "You haven't gone back to your apartment, have you?"

"No, of course not. Why?"

"Don't. According to Art, we're all about two jumps away from jail. Where were you, and how did you come back?"

"In Milano. I wanted to see a man there who claimed he had a new strain of Abyssinians. Came back by plane, the same way I went up. *Why?*"

"Good Lord," said George. "You were lucky they didn't nab you at the airport. All right, the next thing is, give me checks for any funds you've got in Venetian banks. Wait a minute. First, do you have any idea where Morey might be?"

"Marseilles, I think. Now why—"

George stood up somewhat unsteadily. "I'll try to call him there while you're writing the checks. Don't order anything till I get back."

He returned in a moment. "No luck. Either he's on the way back, or you were mistaken. Got the checks?"

"Yes. Here. But listen, George, take pity on my ignorance, will you? *What's* happened to Art? *Why* do you want all my money? I feel as if I'd come in at the second act."

"I'll explain it all to you later or Art will. Oh, damn!" He looked at his watch. "The banks are closed, aren't they?" He tore up the three slips of paper Luther had handed him and stuffed the fragments in his pocket. "Well, look. Art is in the Hotel Scato on the Ruza Vecchia, Suite C 35. Speak German and ask for Herr Bauernfeind—that's the name I gave when I registered. You go on up there as fast as you can, but use the slidewalks; don't take a 'copter. I'll stay here—" George looked unhappily at the wine bottle— "and wait till Morey shows up, or the place closes."

Luther stood up. "All right. Look, though, if Morey is on the way here, and if he started about when I did, he might be within phone range by now. Why don't you try calling him again?"

George clutched at the idea. "I

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will. Wait for me." He went to the booth again and dialed Morey's number.

A voice said, "This is Stiles."

George sighed happily. He said, "George, Morey. How long will it take you to get here? . . . You saw the ad? . . . Good. I'll meet you outside."

AN hour later they were all together in Art's suite, listening to a video newscaster announce, "The following persons are wanted by the Security Police for questioning in connection with a conspiracy against the p[illegible]. Please memorize these names and pictures. If you see one of these persons, communicate immediately with your local S. P. office. Arthur Benjamin Levinson, age 341; residence, Pasadena, California; profession, geneticist. Luther Wallace Wheatley, age 357; residences in Venice, Mexico City and Caulfield, Vermont; independently wealthy." Three more pictures and descriptions of Luther's friends appeared, then George's. Morey was far down the list, which was a long one.

"They'll narrow it down," said Art Levinson. "In a couple of days, at the most, they'll have located all but the four of us. Then you'll really see a fox hunt."

Morey's long face was gloomy. "It don't look good, Art. If you want my opinion, we're licked."

"I didn't say the fox hunt would succeed," Levinson said. "We can slip the hounds and, as long as we're free, we have a chance to get our program across."

Morey shook his head. "Maybe you got some reason to be optimistic, but I don't see it. We've got to throw out all the plans we've made so far, ain't that right?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, will you tell me what in blazes we can *do?* How much money have we got between us?"

They counted up. George had a little over two thousand international credits, Art four hundred, Luther not quite a thousand, and Morey, surprisingly, five thousand.

"It's union money," he said glumly. "If we spend it, that's one more crime chalked up against us. Not that it'll matter. Anyhow, we got just short of eighty-three hundred credits. How far can we get with that?"

"Not very far—if we run," said Art. "If we run, they'll catch us. I think we can take that as a mathematical certainty. That disposes of one of the three alternatives we have, as I see it."

"The other two being?" asked Luther.

"We can give ourselves up," said Art. "Or we can fight. It may

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seem funny, but I honestly think the safest thing we can do—supposing for a minute that we're just interested in saving our necks—is to fight. Or let's say to resist. The other two ways are the next thing to suicide."

Art's round face was flushed with enthusiasm. Luther was smiling quietly, and there was a faint gleam even in Morey's pale eye. George felt a trifle left out. He had an absurd picture of the four of them behind a barricade, doing battle with an endless swarm of policemen.

"Somebody explain this to me, will you?" he asked plaintively.

"He's too young to remember," said Luther kindly. "Tell the boy, Art."

Art leaned forward earnestly, and unconsciously the three hitched themselves forward a little in their chairs.

"George, you probably haven't read much about the two so-called 'World Wars' that preceded the Last War, because in historical perspective they were only a sort of preliminary. But during the second one, when Germany had overrun most of Europe, there was a thing called the Resistance. An underground movement. Their situation was very much like ours—they didn't have enough of an organization to attack openly, or even defend themselves openly. But they did what they could—sabotage, espionage, propaganda, and some guerrilla warfare. In effect, they made themselves one hell of a nuisance to the Germans. We can do the same thing."

"There were more than four of them, though, weren't there?" George asked.

Art said, "An analogy is just an analogy, George, not an identity. As it happens, Golightly's government has one serious disadvantage that the Germans didn't have. The Germans were a frankly oppressive group to begin with, operating to the full extent of their power. Golightly's crowd *can't* fight even a small resistance group—and we'll grow, don't worry—without assuming the characteristics of a tyranny. And, George, this planet simply isn't weak enough or sick enough, economically and politically, to hold still for a tyrant.

"This present group has been continuously in power for more than two centuries, and there isn't one of the inner circle that wouldn't like to extend their power. But we've still got a democracy. Why? Because they haven't got a power concept behind them. They've kept office all this time because they're the best administrators and practical politicians on the planet, *and that's all.* If they stop acting in the people's interest—which

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they've already done — and if enough of the people find out about it—which they will—their goose is cooked."

"This is revolution you're talkin' about," said Morey gently. "A lot of people're going to get hurt."

"I know it," replied Art, looking grimly unhappy. "Show me another way, Morey, and I'll grab it."

"This is just for the record, so to speak," Morey said. "There's an election coming up in eighteen months. We might be able to hook up with Golightly's opposition and get them in."

Luther snorted. "Di Falco? That man is the eternal disappointed candidate."

"And," said Art, "we can't wait eighteen months. All right?"

"Grant the point," agreed Morey reluctantly.

"Okay. Here's a tentative list of tactics I've made up. You'll notice that I've tried to put the emphasis on things that will provoke the government into illegal and, if possible, violent acts. It's like ju-jitsu—we've got to make them use their own strength against themselves."

"Let's see that," said Morey, with such enthusiasm that the other three stared at him. "It's been a long time since a union man had to hit below the belt, but I remember a few tricks, can dig up more from the old books, and maybe invent some of my own."

IV

THERE was an underworld, of course; no society, however perfect, had completely rehabilitated or absorbed the maladjusted who had either too much power drive or not enough, the bitter rebels and the passively defeated, those who wouldn't conform and those who couldn't. In ethical societies, the underworld had consisted of criminal and political malcontents, while harsh tyrannies had suppressed the honest.

George had been vaguely aware of the underworld, but he had never, as far as he knew, encountered any of its denizens. Now, guided by Morey and Levinson, who had maintained cautious contact with it, he found that he had unsuspectingly been quite friendly with a number of people on the Security Police's gray list.

The strange thing was that he had always previously considered these daring semi-criminals the worst bores he knew.

There was the Thanatopsis Club, for instance. Levinson had arranged to have George address them in secret session, and George switched cabs, doubled back several times, skittered through al-

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leys while looking fearfully over his shoulder—and ended in a dismal suburban house belonging to Elbert Maxwell, the ornithologist.

It was a very tense gathering in the living room. Carlotta Speranza was there, a small unattractive bibliographer with a sharp and peering face, who could talk your ear off about ancient literature; Kurt Lustgarten, the philosopher, whose flabbily intense features had backed George into more corners at parties than he liked to remember; Paavo Atterberg, the musicologist, whom George had been more successful at evading, generally because Atterberg could be easily maneuvered to a piano; and other similarly intense people, with eager, hungry eyes and nervous hands, who were unfamiliar to George.

Elbert Maxwell saw him look puzzledly at the TV screen, which was writhing with some frantic dance in full color, and the pair of drinks each person was holding grimly, and the flimsy costumes they wore.

"Camouflage," Maxwell explained, giving a shrill, anxious laugh. "If the police raid us—which has happened a couple of times; we're all suspected of dangerous cultural activities, you know—why, we're simply having an innocent vice party."

"I see," said George, confused. "When do I speak? I have several more addresses to make tonight."

Maxwell glanced at a card he was holding. "Well, we'll try to move you up on the agenda, but I'm afraid you picked a bad night — there's a great deal of business to be done at this meeting."

George took the two antagonistic drinks that were handed him and sat down to listen patiently until his turn came. He was aware of his own tension. He was pretty sure he'd thrown off any possible shadows, but he couldn't know whether the others present had been as clever. They certainly didn't look it. At any moment, the house might be stormed and this pathetic attempt to make a criminal underground meeting seem like a mere orgy wouldn't fool the police.

Maxwell, pretending to watch the TV screen, told the gathering that two more species of bird had become extinct in the last decade, and at least six others were in danger, with the government, as usual, threatening any attempt to save them. The listeners showed every emotion from horror to rage. George tried to feel upset about the situation, but couldn't. It wasn't that he disliked birds; he just thought it was their problem, not his. Maxwell's motion to set up secret bird sanctuaries was carried, and George felt an emo-

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tional response for the first time — at the amount of money they agreed to raise for the project.

Carlotta Speranza, talking passionately about the decline of literature, didn't bother pretending to watch the TV show. She

"You can't do this to me!" Carlotta shrieked. "Are your birds more important to civilization than *literature?*"

"Of course not," Maxwell said hurriedly. "Everything is important. But we can't do everything

wanted an ambitious program begun *immediately* — undercover writing classes, printing plants and distribution channels. Lustgarten objected that the population had been educated away from reading. She added a hit-and-run public campaign to her program. Maxwell, clearly feeling that all this might cut down the funds for his secret aviaries, shrewdly tabled the resolution.

at the same time."

"Then put your program aside temporarily."

Maxwell was shocked. "And let these species vanish *forever?*"

"I think both should be considered by all our colleagues in the underworld," said Atterberg, "but the main thing is raising money to save music." And he tried to go into an excited explanation of the musical crisis, but Maxwell

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made him wait until his speech was scheduled.

Lustgarten spoke next. George tried manfully to listen to his statement on problems of philosophy in an indifferent world, but developed a headache that had to be massaged by a drink. One proved insufficient; he took the other and opposite drink, which acted like an explosive charge to the primer of the first one. He was silently rooting for one team of jet-skaters on TV by the time Lustgarten and Atterberg finished and it was his turn to talk.

George managed somehow to explain the problem. The others listened attentively until it was time to take a vote. Then a split developed. Lustgarten and Atterberg declared that they were personally not involved; they didn't care much if humanity survived unless, as Atterberg put it, there was music in its soul, or philosophy and not brainless frivolity, in Lustgarten's words. A very tall woman with almost no hair on her head, quite a bit on her face and military shoulders stated that she would rather die than submit to breeding.

Maxwell was in favor, as long as the project did not interfere with saving birdlife. When Carlotta Speranza unexpectedly dropped her own program to support George's, and said, "Birds don't create literature, Elbert; *people* do, and we must keep the race going to that end," Maxwell suddenly changed his mind.

"If I have to choose between birds and humanity," he said bitterly, "I'll take birds every time. *They* never exterminated another race of animals! Whereas, what has been humanity's record? One species after another wiped off the planet! Because of viciousness? Greed? At one time, yes—the bison and the egret are two examples. But the motive today is pure lack of interest. We encroached on the habitats of our furred and feathered friends until they could no longer maintain existence, and so went into the limbo of extinct species."

"Wouldn't happen again," George argued fuzzily, realizing that he was neither articulate nor sober enough to overcome Maxwell's notorious literary style. "Everybody dies. New generation takes place. Not enough people to cover Earth. Birds multiply. Animals multiply. Educate new generation to take care of 'em. Teach 'em music and philosophy and literature—everything. Solves all problems same time."

"In how many centuries will the present population die off?" Maxwell demanded. "What happens to animal life in that time? Wiped out, sir—wiped out completely! No, I'll let humanity die out before I'll allow another spe-

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cies ever to become extinct!"

"But voting against the birth program won't hasten the end of mankind," Carlotta Speranza pointed out heatedly. "It will still take the same number of centuries before we all die."

"Abs'lutely right," George agreed.

It didn't change the vote, however. George acquired Carlotta and two other women and one man who looked singularly unfertile as members of the conspiracy.

He was told how to get to his next appointment, given a few more drinks for the road, and, though he remembered only a blurrily earnest face or two in indistinctly different living rooms, he had nearly two dozen signed applications to turn over to Levinson in the morning.

"You've done fine, George," Levinson said enthusiastically, while George shakily placed a hangover capsule on his fuzz-covered tongue. "The organization is under way!"

"It's awfully hard on the eardrums and the bladder," George complained. "Right now, I don't feel that saving humanity is worth the trouble."

"You'll learn not to listen," said Morey encouragingly. "Even to yourself, as a matter of fact. I know—I can make any number of union speeches without even hearing myself. Habit."

"And all the drinking I have to do?" George asked, pulling down his lower eyelids to see the engorged veins more clearly.

"It's free, isn't it? And you can carry alcohol-neutralizing tablets with you."

George turned around in horror. "Then where's the fun?"

V

GEORGE'S beard itched. He had had it for almost a month now, but it didn't appear that he was ever going to get used to it. Or to the wax Art Levinson had injected under the skin at the bridge of his nose, to give him a new profile. He kept compulsively scratching the area and it seemed to have set up some kind of local irritation. He had a plastiskin bandage over it now, which increased the hump and made the disguise better, though still more annoying, but at least it kept his fingernails away. After this weekend, when he'd meet the other three in Seville to compare notes, he'd have it attended to; meanwhile, there was nothing to do but bear it. There were doctors in Paris to whom it would be safe to go, but George didn't know them; that was Levinson's department. They had decided to work apart as much as possible,

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so that the capture of one might hinder their activities, but wouldn't stop them altogether.

At the moment, ironically enough, both the itches, as well as the skin dye and new hairline, were entirely unnecessary. George, mingling as usual with the largest crowd he could find anywhere, was attending the annual Beaux Arts Ball as one of approximately three hundred robed, tinted and masked pseudo-African witch doctors—this costume being, for no discoverable reason, the season's favorite.

Aside from the itches, he was enjoying himself thoroughly. He danced with all the prettiest women, who, according to immemorial custom, concealed about as much of themselves as the male guests left uncovered. He flirted with them, kissed them if they seemed amenable, and, whenever a fold of bustle or headdress gave him the opportunity, concealed leaflets on their persons.

It was a safe method: most of the pamphlets probably would not be found until the costumes were removed. And although he observed that more of the ladies than he had counted on were dispensing with concealment at the ball itself, he was further protected by his costume and his excellent French. In case of extreme emergency, he had thoughtfully provided himself with a skin-tight Lucifer suit under the witch-doctor's robes.

Temporarily without a partner, George made his way through the press of bodies to a pillar, where he steadied himself long enough to look at his watch. It was getting on toward the unmasking hour. He looked around, over the heads of the crowd, to make sure he knew where the nearest side exit was. He was expecting something of a rumpus when it came time to unmask; there might be arrests.

A masked man in S. P. uniform went by, closely clasped by a sumptuous dark girl at least a foot taller than himself. There were a good many S. P. costumes in the hall, and George suspected that the greater part of them were genuine.

He turned, and his elbow sank into something soft and warm. He heard a stifled "*Ah!*" and saw that he had knocked the wind out of a young woman with astonishingly large eyes and an even more surprising bosom. He apologized, profusely.

"Large pig," she shouted in his ear. "I forgive you. Embrace me."

He did so, and felt her hands passing inquisitively over his flanks and chest, under the robe. She murmured, "Mmm," and kissed him a little harder.

He broke away gently, feeling

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that reconciliation had gone as far as it respectably could. She gave him an impish smile and disappeared into the crowd.

George put two fingers cautiously under his robe and discovered a tiny oblong of folded paper. He opened it and saw the familiar headline: NAISSANCE OU MORT! It was a copy of his own leaflet, printed on the same sort of home copier he used himself.

He put it away with the rest of his supply. The movement he had started was growing wonderfully well.

He went around the periphery of the crowd in the opposite direction to the one the girl had taken. Just ahead of him, near the bar, he saw a slender woman jostled by a passing man in a frog suit. Her glass slipped out of her fingers, and the liquor spread a dark stain over her flowing taffeta skirt.

George whipped out his handkerchief and moved forward to help. Then he paused. The woman's hair was coppery and abundant, and the mouth below her half-mask was of a particular perfection he had seen only once in his life. Hilda.

Caution told him to avoid her, but he had to be sure. He moved forward again, knelt beside her and dabbed at the stained skirt.

"Thank you so much," she said in French, "but I'm afraid it's a hopeless mess now."

It was her voice: George felt the customary tingling down his backbone. He had not seen Hilda since the night Art arrived in Venice, and had not hoped to see her for a long time to come. But it wasn't safe to let her recognize him. He stood up, bowed, and turned away without speaking.

She caught suddenly at his arm, turned him around again. "George!" she said. "It *is* you. Where have you been hiding? I've looked everywhere. And Luther and Morey . . . What *is* all this nonsense?"

George felt a little relieved, in spite of himself. Of course, she would know him from his youth alone, just as he knew her by her mouth. He said, "Hello, Hilda. I've missed you."

"George." She put her lips close to his ear. "You won't hide from me any more, will you? We've got such a lot to tell each other—"

A shattering blare of trumpets from the center of the room interrupted her. A much-amplified voice cried, "*Mesdames et messieurs,* the hour of unmasking is at hand. Choose your partners!"

The babel of voices, which had subsided for a moment, rose again. George glanced at his watch, then at the rafters high above. He could just make out a tiny gray-blue dot there, hanging among the clustered lanterns.

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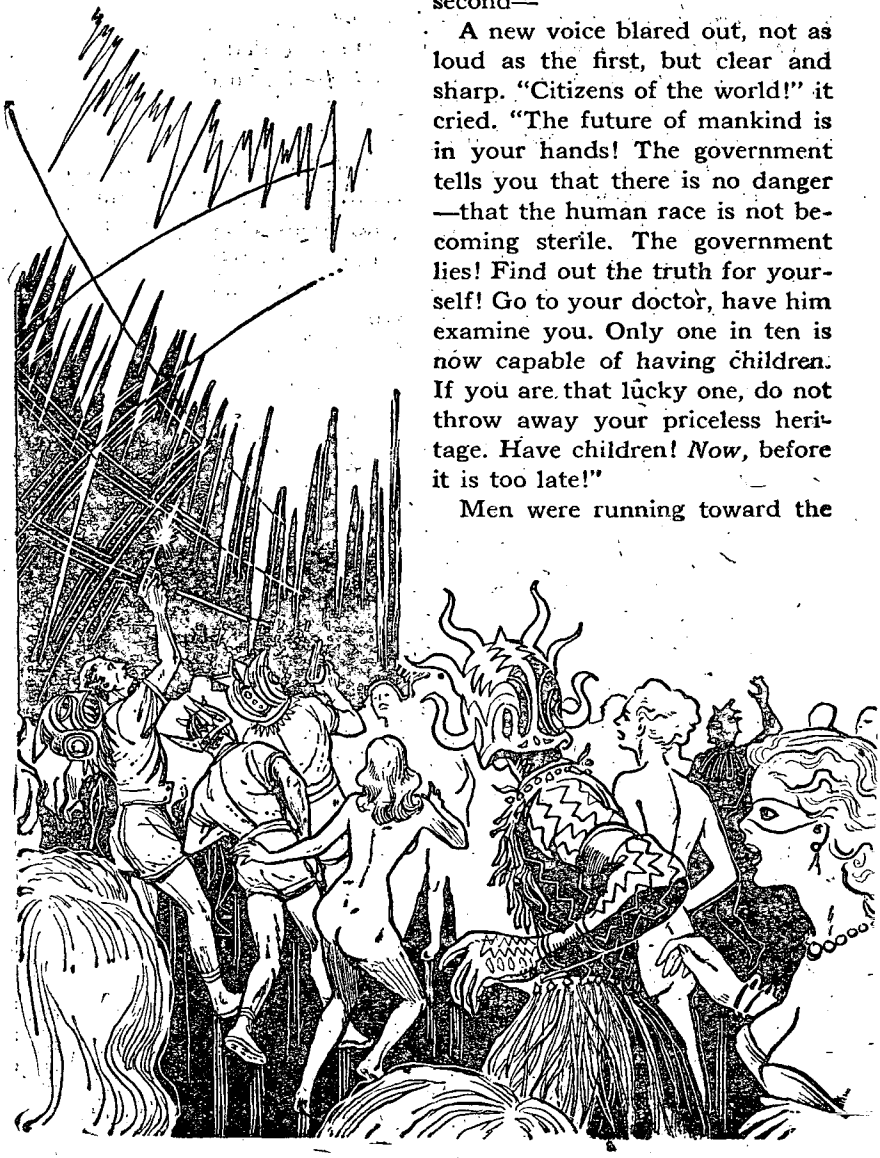
It was time, this minute, this second—

A new voice blared out, not as loud as the first, but clear and sharp. "Citizens of the world!" it cried. "The future of mankind is in your hands! The government tells you that there is no danger—that the human race is not becoming sterile. The government lies! Find out the truth for yourself! Go to your doctor, have him examine you. Only one in ten is now capable of having children. If you are that lucky one, do not throw away your priceless heritage. Have children! *Now*, before it is too late!"

Men were running toward the



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center of the room; George heard shouts and a few screams. The voice — George's own, recorded through a filter to make it unrecognizable—went on: "If the government is telling the truth, why is it afraid of open debate? Why are your newspapers censored? Why are you yourselves subject to illegal arrest and imprisonment without trial? Why—"

A flat explosion drowned the voice, then another. There was a new outburst of feminine screams, and a sudden violent movement away from the center. The S. P.s, George guessed, were shooting at the playback mechanism he had bribed a workman to set up among the lanterns. It was time to get away.

His recorded voice went on, but another drowned it out. "No one is to leave! Unmask, everyone, and stand where you are!"

The movement away from the center continued. In the press, Hilda was clinging to his arm, shouting something at him. He broke away and dived into the crowd, heading for the side exit he had spotted before.

He was a little too late. The crowd was in full motion now, as irresistible as a charging herd of cattle. Ahead of him, he saw an S. P. man vainly struggling to turn and halt those behind. He

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saw the flash of a revolver; then someone clubbed the man in the neck and he went down under the feet of the crowd.

George had a sudden, terrified thought: *What if that should happen to Hilda?* But he was caught in the tide of bodies; it was useless even to think of turning back.

The wide doors of the main entrance had been thrown open, but there was still a bottleneck. The pressure grew until George thought his ribs would crack; then he was out and running desperately to keep from being trampled.

An S. P. car was pulled up at the opposite curb and, as he watched, another joined it. S. P.s tumbled out, tried to form a line. The crowd overwhelmed them. There were shouts of "*A bas les flics!*" and roars of laughter scattered among the screams.

The crowd's temper was changing from fear to defiance. There would be broken windows and broken heads in Paris tonight.

George's devil costume was now as dangerous as the witch doctor robes; anybody in carnival dress who was unlucky enough to meet a policeman would be arrested. He stopped in an alley to strip them both off—he wore a singlet and shorts underneath—and then put the noise of the rioting behind him before he crossed the Seine to his hotel.

On the sidewalk in front of the hotel a huge N/M! was chalked—the symbol of the Committee Against Human Extinction, N/M in French and Spanish, G/T in German, B/D in English: *Birth or Death!* They had begun it themselves, flying from city to city, one to a continent; the people had taken it up.

He thought again of Hilda, and looked at his wrist phone. They no longer used the personal phones to communicate among themselves, since it was possible that the S. P. was monitoring all such calls; but it would do no harm to call Hilda, especially if he kept the contact short. He pressed the buttons that coded her number.

"Yes?" said her warm voice. "This is Hilda Place."

"It's George," he told her. "Are you all right?"

"George, where *are* you? I must see you. Joe is here with me. Tell me where you are and we'll dash over."

"It wouldn't do," said George regretfully. "I only wanted to know if you got out all right."

"Yes, George, of course. But—"

"Good night, Hilda," he said, and broke the connection.

It was almost time for the

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hourly newscast, but George sat for a few moments staring at the dead vision set, thinking about Hilda. Then he began thinking about himself and Hilda, which was more complicated.

He hardly knew what it was he felt about Hilda, except that he wanted her. He knew that there was no basis for a settled relationship between them, but his mind rebelled at the knowledge.

Well, if they succeeded in this, things would be different. Everybody would have to revise his view of life. The family would revive; religion with it, probably. The changes would go deep into the social structure, as Art and Luther said: affecting manners, morals, ultimately every department of human life.

Not all at once, of course. For one thing, fewer than one person in ten would manage to become a parent before reaching the sterile age; and not all of those would be able, or want, to equate parenthood with marriage.

George's own part in the new world was still hazy to him. He tried valiantly once more to see himself happily married to Hilda, and once more failed. The picture was simply wrong, in every way. He didn't have the conjugal temperament, and neither, he was sure, did Hilda. What was going to become of them, who had been born into this childless world of cautious carelessness and sage superficiality, and knew no other?

That was rather good, George told himself. He was surprised and pleased; his wit was ordinarily of the evanescent variety, not worth using more than once. When he wrote his memoirs—

There was a knock on the door.

"*Entrez,*" said George, and the door, keyed to his voice, swung open. Two S. P. men stood there. They did not hesitate, but strode rapidly toward him.

With an effort, George relaxed his tensed muscles and looked at the advancing officers with what he hoped was the right mixture of alarm and indignation.

"What is it? What's the matter?" he demanded.

The taller officer had a sheaf of photographs in his hand. He riffled them rapidly, selected one, and looked keenly from it to George's face several times. He said something in an undertone to the other man.

The short, stocky one drew his gun and stepped aside. "I shall have to request you to come with us, monsieur. A formality only. If you are innocent, you will be freed."

"But what is the charge?" asked George.

"You are wanted for questioning in connection with the riot at the Beaux Arts Ball, monsieur."

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"I wasn't even there!" George protested.

The officer shrugged. "That may be, monsieur. It is believed that the instigator of the riot is not a native of Paris. Therefore, we are investigating all guests of hotels. Those whose appearances are similar to those on these photographs are to be brought in for questioning. You are not under formal arrest, monsieur, unless you insist."

George felt a hollowness at the pit of his stomach. Such an obvious move and they had not thought of it! He said, "Very well," and moved toward the door. The tall officer grasped his arm, the other fell in behind them.

At the doorway, George lunged forward. As the tall officer instinctively pulled back, George followed his motion, turning at the same time and putting the heel of his hand under the other man's chin. He shoved, hard, and the officer went reeling back into the room. George slammed the door in their faces and ran.

The elevator was not at this floor. He dived down the staircase, took the first flight four steps at a time, and doubled back on the floor below to the other staircase. He guessed that the S. P.s had come by car; for a house-to-house search, it would be more efficient than 'copters. If he was right, he had a fair chance of hailing a cab and getting away before they found him.

Back on his own floor, he peered cautiously around the corner before emerging from the stairway. His room door was open, but there was no one in the corridor. He heard nothing. He darted out and up the ascending staircase.

The roof was silent and deserted under the stars, glowing at his feet in a wash of light from the tubes that outlined the roof. Traffic went by inaudibly, high overhead in the dark sky.

He saw the yellow riding lights of an unoccupied cab, not directly above, but bearing a little to one side. He took out his flashlight and blinked at it, trying hard to get the aim right; it was a long distance and a difficult angle.

The 'copter did not turn. It kept its course and disappeared finally down toward the Eiffel Tower.

He heard a sound down the stairwell. It was an ambiguous, uncomfortable sort of sound. He listened, but it was not repeated.

He walked quietly behind the stair entrance and tried again. Another empty cab was approaching, no nearer than the first. He aimed the flashlight tube at it, blinked it rapidly on and off.

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After a heart-stopping moment, the cab turned toward him. And then he heard stealthy sounds in the stairwell. He listened. Footsteps, coming up.

He glanced at the oncoming cab. Too late; too far away. He went quickly to the nearest parapet, and holding the tiny flashlight like a dagger, stabbed it at the glow tube. Glass tinkled and fell, and the light died along that edge of the roof. The corner was only a few steps away; he broke the next tube as well. Now the roof was lighted only on the two sides farthest from him, and the stair entrance cast a long, deep shadow.

He heard them step out onto the roof. They must have had a third man waiting in the car downstairs, George thought; when they learned that he had not appeared down there, they had turned back to search upstairs.

The cab had turned away, now that the signal had stopped and the edge-lights gone out. George watched its tiny lights dwindle.

The footsteps came toward him, slowly, one pair on either side of the entrance. Two beams of light shot out, illuminating all the roof except the rear wall of the entranceway where he stood.

"You had better surrender, monsieur," said a voice. "Otherwise we are obliged to shoot."

George pressed himself thin against the wall and tried to breathe quietly. The voice had come from the right; that was the spokesman, the stocky man with the gun. Therefore, he guessed, the other would step out first. He moved silently to the left, raised his arm and waited.

The tall man stepped suddenly into view, swinging his flash around. George brought the edge of his palm down with all his strength, aiming for the man's wrist, but hitting the flashlight instead. Pain rolled up his arm as the metal tube fell; then, blinded by the light that had shone in his eyes, he was struggling with the tall S. P. man. He struck out furiously, feeling a blow in return that numbed his side, and then the two of them toppled to the roof.

George struck the other man once more, felt the grip loosen, and scrambled desperately to his feet. As he started to turn, a crushing pain struck him at the base of his skull. He saw the roof's surface rising toward him, but felt nothing when it hit him.

VI

HE was in a 'copter with a rope ladder dangling from it, hovering just over the bedroom window of Luther's apartment. Art was inside, but he wouldn't

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climb out onto the ladder. George was about to pull the ladder up and tie a wrench to it when Art's red, wild-eyed face appeared.

Hurry, hurry! Art was climbing up the ladder, and now the window next door opened and a man was leaning out, with a gun in his hand.

George was paralyzed with fear. He saw the man fire, and when he looked down, Art's face was white and a thin spray of blood was whipping away from his body in the wind of the rotors.

He's hit, George thought. *He'll fall.*

George tilted the 'copter downward, toward the canal, but he was too late. Art fell, and the blue water of the canal turned red . . .

No, that was silly. All that was over and done with; they had come out of that all right. It was the Beaux Arts Ball that he had to worry about. His voice was bellowing out of the concealed playback machine, and everyone was turning to stare at him. He looked down, and saw that his witch-doctor's robe was gone. He was standing there in the devil suit.

All the others were shouting, "There he is! He's the one!"

He ran, but the crowd got in his way; he couldn't move fast enough. And just behind him was the stocky man with the gun. He couldn't get away, death was behind him, the gun-barrel rising, the finger tightening on the trigger—

Ugh!

He sat up, looking uncomprehendingly at the strange patterns of light and shadow around him. His head hurt, and he couldn't raise his hands. Someone flashed a light in his eyes. Dazzled, he said, "What—*who are you? What* are you doing?"

A voice said, "*Bien.*" Someone got up from beside his cot, and two men, one in a white jacket, left the room. He could see them briefly in the light of the corridor outside. Another man, in a guard's uniform, shut the barred door with a clang, and went away.

There was an interval long enough for him to come fully awake, and discover that his wrists were manacled to the sides of the cot. Then two guards appeared at the door, unlocked it and entered. One of them removed the manacles and helped him to his feet. He tried to throw off the man's arm, but found that he was too weak; too weak, in fact, to stand by himself.

They led him along the corridor and into a small, brightly lit room where there was a heavy chair, bolted to the floor. They sat him in it and strapped his wrists down.

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A white-jacketed man at the side of the room was removing a hypodermic from a sterilizer. He turned, fitted the needle to the transparent shaft, depressed the plunger and thrust the needle through the covering membrane of a bottle. He stepped toward George.

George gripped the arms of the chair, remembering what Art had told him about truth serums. "They're not infallible. If you have a strong, balanced personality, and if you think up a good cover story and stick to it, truth serums won't make you tell the truth.

I was at the ball, he thought rapidly, *but I had nothing to do with the plot. I haven't seen Luther, Art or Morey since that party at Luther's. I don't know where they are. I don't know where they are. I ran from the police because I seduced a woman at the ball, and her boyfriend was angry with me. I was afraid he had made trouble for me with the police. That's not good, but it will have to do.*

He felt the coolness of evaporating alcohol on his arm, then the cold stab of the needle. *I was at the ball,* he told himself, *but I had nothing to do with the plot. I haven't seen Luther, Art, or Morey . . . or Luther, or Morey . . .*

He was beginning to feel drowsy. The words tripped over each other in his head, became hopelessly jumbled.

There was a timeless, drowsy interval; then he became aware that a hot rubber sheath was being removed from his arm. His body was stiff, and his hands and feet were numb.

He opened his eyes. The white-jacketed man was stuffing something that clicked into an oblong box. He stowed the box away in a clip at the side of a massive instrument board on wheels, and an attendant pushed it out of the room.

The man looked at George, flexing the fingers of one hand in the palm of the other. "You gave us a hard time," he said. "But you talked."

George kept his mouth shut, even when the guards came back, unstrapped him and returned him to his cell.

Probably the man had been bluffing; they were hoping that he could be tricked into talking by making him believe that he already had.

But early the next morning, he was transferred to another, a larger cell. In it were Luther, Art and Morey.

Art said, "You knew where we were all going to be yesterday. If the truth drug didn't get it out of you, all they had to do was put a lie detector on you and show you a map—point out one

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area after another until you responded. It wasn't your fault, George."

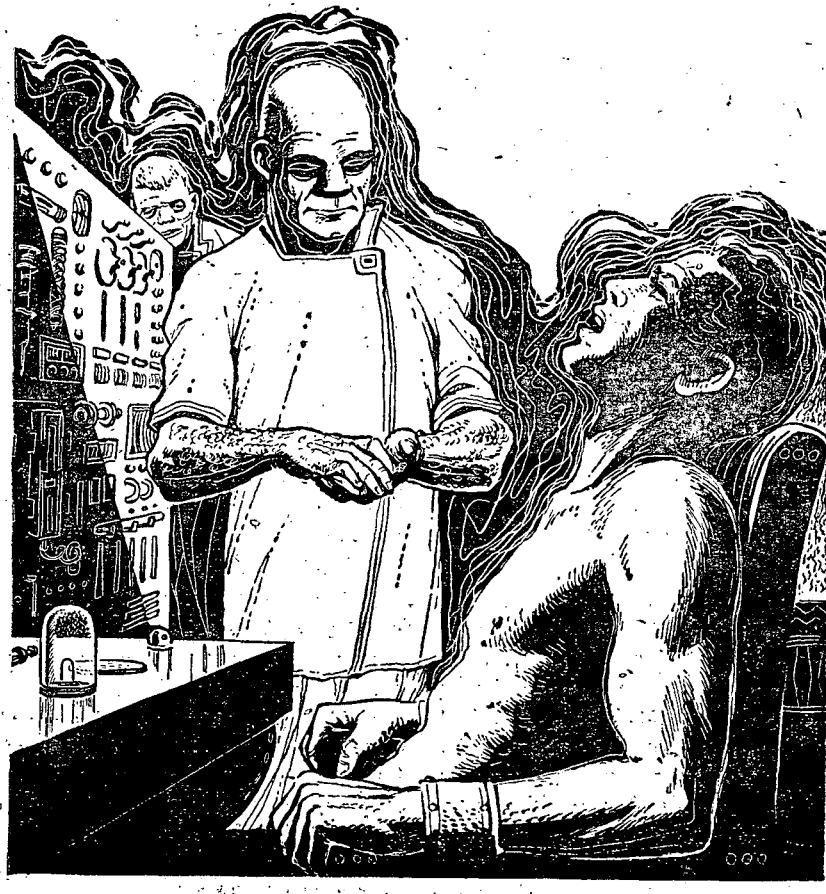
That was the way it had been done, all right, but the knowledge didn't make him feel any better. He sat down on the empty cot, elbows on his knees.

"I shouldn't have got caught," he said.

"Could've happened to any of us," Morey assured him.

They were silent a while, and then George said, "Where are we, by the way?"

"S. P. headquarters on the



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Place de Concorde. They'll move us to Berne for the trials, I suppose." Art shrugged. "*If* they decide to have any trials."

The day dragged by, then another and another. On the fourth day, they were told they were going to be moved in the afternoon, but nothing happened. They had no news of the outside world; they could only speculate how the movement was going without them. All four of them had been up for interrogation several times, and they were afraid that at least one of them had given up names and addresses under the truth serum. There was no way of knowing. If the network they had carefully built up had been uncovered, there was no hope left. The conspiracy was too young to recover from such a blow.

By tacit consent, they did not talk about anything they had done before their arrest. But Art, one afternoon, began speculating about the future. He spoke of it as if it were a foregone conclusion, as if they were as good as dead.

He said, "It would be interesting to see it. After a few more centuries, I expect things will begin to go to pot in a small way. Things like new construction. The population's steadily declining, and you know there won't be any new generations, so why build? And after that, why repair? A little later on, I'd guess that suicide would begin to be a factor again. When they begin to *realize* that if there is any point to the whole bloody business, the human race will never have a chance to find it out . . . Not much room for altruism any more.

"We're here, and we're the last, and that's all. After that, nothing but the big dark and the big cold. Besides, it isn't going to be very pleasant later on, and people will begin to see that, too. There's a bottom limit to the size of population that can support an industrial economy. They'll pass it, going down. Then what? Back to the land? A mocked-up feudal system?

"But then the process will start to accelerate, I should think. Wars. Plagues. Natural catastrophes. Crop failures. Looters and bandits. Every man for himself. And at the end—"

He smiled bitterly. "None of us would be alive to see that, anyhow. Women's life-span is still longer than ours. It'll end up as a world of women — women without men. Lord!" He shook his head. "That goes beyond my imagination. I can't visualize it, and I don't want to. The little that I can see scares me silly."

He looked at them as if he had forgotten they were there.

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"Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to turn this into a wake."

George thought a good deal about Golightly, and the rest of that stubborn, irrational, power-hungry crew. He found that he didn't hate them, but it made him feel somehow betrayed to realize that these were the best rulers Earth had been able to produce. Good administrators, good practical politicians, as Art had said—but little men, jealous of their position, fearful of new ideas. If that was the best the human race could do, perhaps it deserved what it was getting.

He voiced something of this, and got the disagreement from Luther that he had hoped for.

"We can do better, George. We *have* done better. In a normal world, no matter how bad things get, at least they change. If we were bringing up a flock of children now, one of them would be a better candidate for World President than Golightly. But as it is, we're stuck with just about three generations all told, and we have to make the best of it . . ." His voice trailed off; none of them wanted to pursue that thought.

ON the morning of the eighth day, guards came to take them away.

George turned to Luther. "In case they separate us, and we don't see each other again—"

Luther took his hand warmly. They gripped hands all around. There were tears in Art's owlish eyes, and in Luther's, and even a suspicious brightness in Morey's. George found that his own vision was blurring a trifle.

The guards led them down the corridor to an outer office with a long desk and a bench. They were told to sit down, and then a printed document and a pen was placed in front of each of them.

George stared bewilderedly at his. It seemed to say:

> In return for due consideration, I hereby waive all claim for damages resulting from my mistaken arrest and detention by the Security Police, and further agree to waive my right of suit for false arrest against the Security Police and the United Nations of the World. In witness whereof I set my seal.

He looked at the others, then at the guard who was standing on the other side of the table.

"Sign," said the guard, "and you'll be released."

Art bent suddenly and began to scribble on his sheet. The others followed suit. Not daring to speak, they looked at each other as the signed papers were taken away. Then a guard led them off, each to a separate cubicle. In his, George found the clothes he had been wearing when he was arrested, and all the contents of his pockets neatly

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stacked. He put on the clothing, still dazed. The guard, not touching him now, led him out through another outer office, through a lobby, where the other three joined him, and then to the sunlight of the portico.

The sounds of traffic came up to them; 'copters droned past in the sky over their heads; they heard a strain of music from somewhere down the great avenue.

The guard reappeared and touched George's elbow. "I was asked to give you this, monsieur," he said, and put a slip of paper into George's hand. Then he bowed and went back inside.

George unfolded it slowly, read it twice.

It said:

Come and see me as soon as you can.
Hilda

There was an address below the signature.

George passed the note to Morey, and the other two looked over his shoulders.

"I don't get it," said George inadequately.

"No more do I," said Luther. "But—let's go!"

They found her on a terrace overlooking the Champs Elysees. Joe Krueger, grinning like a youngster, got up from the table and stood aside as they converged on Hilda.

She smiled up at them. "I'm so glad," she said. "Now kiss me nicely, each of you, and then sit down . . . You there, Luther, in the easy chair, then Morey, Art and George."

They said hello to Joe. They took the coffee cups Hilda passed around. And they stared at her.

"Hilda," said Luther finally, "you consummate witch, what in the world did you do?"

She smiled at them happily. "Well," she said, "I managed to get to see Golightly. It wasn't easy to do, even though I know his granddaughter quite well. I had to convince *her* first, you see . . . No, you don't see. You will, in a minute, though. I told him that he couldn't stop people from having children by throwing you in jail. I told him that women had been breaking the birth prohibition for the last seventy years, to my own knowledge, and probably longer. And I proved it to him—I showed him a doctor's report that stated I had been a mother myself."

They stared at her. George felt as if the last prop of his own personal universe had been knocked out from under him.

"*You,* Hilda?" said Luther incredulously.

"Oh, yes." She looked back at them, not smiling now, and laid her hand on Joe Krueger's sleeve. "This is my son, gentlemen—my

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youngest son. I have three."

There was a shocked silence.

Joe said, "She brought me up in a private estate in the Berkshires, with some help from my brothers, but alone most of the time. She nursed me, took care of me when I was sick, and taught me everything she could. For twenty years . . . My twentieth birthday was two months ago."

Luther said, "Hilda, do I understand that you began this absolutely alone?"

She smiled, but it was a different smile from the one they knew. Her face had changed subtly, George thought; there was a calm patience and wisdom in it that had never been there before —or that she had never allowed them to see.

Her eyes softened, and she said, "I don't blame you, darlings, because you don't *know*—you can't know. Poor things, you run the world, but you don't understand what keeps it going.

"Anyhow, I told Golightly all that, and I presented a chemical analysis of Joe's blood. He hasn't had the longevity treatment yet, you know; that showed in the test. And then I gave him some statistics Joe had dug up. You'd better tell that part, Joe."

"I was curious to know whether the incidence of amnesia had gone up since the Last War," said Joe. "I had an idea that other people besides Hilda had thought of that dodge. So I checked. It was up, way up. There was even an article about it in the North American Journal of Psychology, not so many years ago."

Art muttered something in an irritated voice.

"Art?" said Hilda.

"Nothing. I saw that article; I remember it now. It didn't make any impression on me."

"Or on anybody, apparently," said Joe "—luckily for us members of the younger generation." He grinned. "Then I looked up some population figures and drew curves. You couldn't prove anything that way, but it was significant if you knew the answer to begin with. After the War, the line went downward fairly sharply for about the first century, and then it began to level off just a little more than anyone had expected. *At a rough guess, there are several hundred million people alive today who were born after the birth prohibition!*"

Inside the apartment, a fax machine chuckled to itself and then sounded a clear note. Luther jumped, and George started to rise.

Hilda said, "You get it, will you, Joe?" The young man—it was astonishing how young he seemed, now—smiled and went inside. He came out a moment

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later and handed the fax sheet to George.

George read, " 'The birth prohibition has been rescinded, it was revealed at 10 A. M. Greenwich time today, by an extraordinary session of the Executive Council meeting in Berne. President Golightly released the following statement:

" ' "It has been proved to my satisfaction, and to the satisfaction of the highest medical authorities, that a clear danger of total sterility of the human race exists. Under these circumstances, grave though the decision is, I have no possible alternative but to revoke all penalties against giving birth.

" ' "We stand today at the crossroads of human destiny. On one hand we see the total extinction of our kind; on the other, a new and more glorious fulfilment. The centuries to come will be hard ones for some of us; they will bring many profound changes in our society, and many grave problems. But given the boundless courage of our people, and their unflinching determination to succeed—" ' "

"Does he *say* anything else?" asked Art.

"No. But here's something about us. 'Arthur Levinson, M. D., George Miller, Morey Stiles and Luther Wheatley, ringleaders of the so-called Committee Against Human Extinction, were released early this morning by the Paris division of the Security Police. In a special statement, S. P. chief Paul Krzewski characterized their activities as "sincere but premature," and indicated that no charges would be pressed against any member of their organization.' "

Morey lit a cigar. "That's about as much thanks as we'll ever get," he said.

"You weren't finished, were you, Hilda?" Art asked. "I don't quite see Golightly listening to reason, even with all that evidence."

"No," she said. "All that first part was just the preliminary. Then I called in his granddaughter—she was waiting outside. That was why I had to persuade her before I could do anything."

"I begin to see the light," said Art softly. "She's a mother, too."

"Of course. I've known it for years. As a matter of fact—this is rather funny, and something I didn't know before—she told Golightly that his private secretary is her daughter."

Her face grew pinker. She leaned her forehead on her hand for a moment. Her shoulders were shaking. "You should have seen his *face!*" she said.

They were all roaring with laughter, the tension in them dissolving to leave them weak and

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wonderfully relieved. It was several moments before George glanced at Hilda and saw that Joe was standing over her in an attitude of concern, his hand on her shoulder. Her head was still bent into her palm. George realized abruptly that she was no longer laughing, but crying.

He stood up and went around to her, feeling awkward. "Anything I can do?" he asked.

Hilda dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief and then looked up at them. "Just a touch of hysterics, I guess. I do feel like a fool. Only—I didn't realize how scared I'd been."

George squeezed her shoulder and went back to his place. Joe left the table again to bring in a bottle of Chablis and glasses; there was a pleasant interval of tinkling and gurgling, and when it was over, Hilda was her usual self again.

Luther raised his glass. "To Hilda."

"Hilda, my dear," said Art slowly, "would you mind telling me *why* you did it? I hope I don't sound ungrateful, but—it wasn't just to save our lives?"

Hilda hesitated a moment. "No, Art."

"I didn't think so," he said. "I've just now managed to picture you as a mother, and in that light I can see you doing almost anything else for us four, obtuse as you must have thought us—but not risking a hair of young Joe's head."

She smiled fondly at him. "I don't really think you're obtuse, Art. If I sounded that way, it was just feminist exaggeration. I suppose you're thinking now that all your trouble and danger were for nothing, because we women have been breeding right along . . . but I don't think that's true.

"I think that's the difference, the really fundamental difference, between men and women. We women endure—we plug along, doing the obvious things, keeping house and worrying about our men and bearing children and so on. And if we didn't, Lord knows what would become of us all. But left to ourselves, we're too conservative. Women *felt* this problem of children from the beginning, and solved it on their own level. But not completely, not satisfactorily. You four discovered the same problem intellectually only a few months ago, and look what you've done!"

She made little fists on the table for a moment. "I'll confess that it was very hard for me to risk Joe. And I didn't do it, finally, because of my fondness for you four. If it had been only that, I honestly don't know what I should have done.

"But—well, perhaps an example will show you best. My oldest

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son, Edwin, wants to be a doctor, wants it more than anything. He's fifty years old now—that's a long time to wait for the one thing you want most in the world. But there are no medical schools, only research seminars and a few brush-up courses. There's no place in the world now like the one where Art got his earliest training."

"There will be," promised Art.

"Of course. And a million other things . . . It isn't particularly good for a child to be brought up in hiding, as Joe was."

"No one could have done it any better than you, Hilda," said Joe.

"Sweet," she said; "but you all know I'm right."

"Of course you are," agreed Luther. "In fact, you're so right that I'm a little afraid of you. It was much nicer when I thought you were pretty much a feather-brain."

George said suddenly, "Joe, I never wangled you that introduction I promised you, did I?"

Joe's eyes brightened. "To Clarke, the rocket man?"

"That's the one. Luther, can you arrange it?"

"A pleasure. I didn't know you were interested, Joe."

"Yes," said Hilda, a little regretfully, "I wish he weren't."

Joe looked uncomfortable. Morey spoke up unexpectedly: "You'll have to face it, though, Hilda. This is one of the spheres where men take over."

"That's right," said Morey, "that's where they'll have to go, the overflow, the extra population that's had us all trembling in our socks the last three centuries. To the stars." He pushed his chair back and sat looking out over the sunlit street, and the 'copters flashing in the sky. "That will make Golightly and me happy, at least, for the next few hundred years." He smiled his unexpected, small-boy smile. "We can sit here and be as contrary and stubborn as we want. But we'll be just a backwater, Hilda. It's your Joe that's going to be the human race."

They drank to that, and afterward George found himself alone with Hilda for a moment before they left. She kissed him gently: there were no tingles up his spine. He felt warmly fond of her, and somehow at peace with himself.

The world was going to grow down to his size, he realized. He wouldn't be The Child any more, not to everybody. In fact, the first colony on that far-off planet of Alpha Centauri might need a few older men around—men with a few centuries of solid experience under their belts. Now *there* was an idea!

Happily, he went down into the long afternoon.

—DAMON KNIGHT

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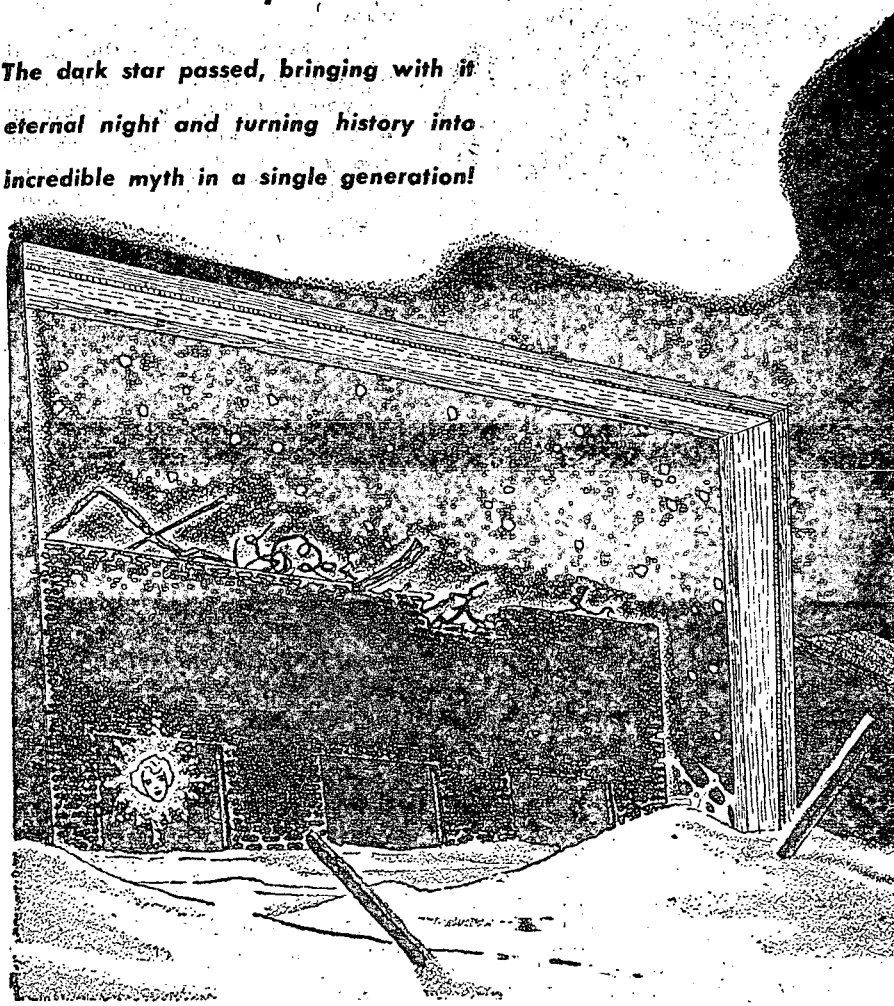
A Pail of Air

By FRITZ LEIBER

The dark star passed, bringing with it eternal night and turning history into incredible myth in a single generation!



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PA had sent me out to get an extra pail of air. I'd just about scooped it full and most of the warmth had leaked from my fingers when I saw the thing.

You know, at first I thought it was a young lady. Yes, a beautiful young lady's face all glowing in the dark and looking at me from the fifth floor of the opposite apartment, which hereabouts is the floor just above the white blanket of frozen air. I'd never seen a live young lady before, except in the old magazines—Sis is just a kid and Ma is pretty sick and miserable—and it gave me such a start that I dropped the pail. Who wouldn't, knowing everyone on Earth was dead except Pa and Ma and Sis and you?

Even at that, I don't suppose I should have been surprised. We all see things now and then. Ma has some pretty bad ones, to judge from the way she bugs her eyes at nothing and just screams and screams and huddles back against the blankets hanging around the Nest. Pa says it is natural we should react like that sometimes.

When I'd recovered the pail and could look again at the opposite apartment, I got an idea of what Ma might be feeling at those times, for I saw it wasn't

Illustrated by ED ALEXANDER

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a young lady at all but simply a light—a tiny light that moved stealthily from window to window, just as if one of the cruel little stars had come down out of the airless sky to investigate why the Earth had gone away from the Sun, and maybe to hunt down something to torment or terrify, now that the Earth didn't have the Sun's protection.

I tell you, the thought of it gave me the creeps. I just stood there shaking, and almost froze my feet and did frost my helmet so solid on the inside that I couldn't have seen the light even if it had come out of one of the windows to get me. Then I had the wit to go back inside.

Pretty soon I was feeling my familiar way through the thirty or so blankets and rugs Pa has got hung around to slow down the escape of air from the Nest, and I wasn't quite so scared. I began to hear the tick-ticking of the clocks in the Nest and knew I was getting back into air, because there's no sound outside in the vacuum, of course. But my mind was still crawly and uneasy as I pushed through the last blankets—Pa's got them faced with aluminum foil to hold in the heat—and came into the Nest.

LET me tell you about the Nest. It's low and snug, just room for the four of us and our things. The floor is covered with thick woolly rugs. Three of the sides are blankets, and the blankets roofing it touch Pa's head. He tells me it's inside a much bigger room, but I've never seen the real walls or ceiling.

Against one of the blanket-walls is a big set of shelves, with tools and books and other stuff, and on top of it a whole row of clocks. Pa's very fussy about keeping them wound. He says we must never forget time, and without a sun or moon, that would be easy to do.

The fourth wall has blankets all over except around the fireplace, in which there is a fire that must never go out. It keeps us from freezing and does a lot more besides. One of us must always watch it. Some of the clocks are alarm and we can use them to remind us. In the early days there was only Ma to take turns with Pa—I think of that when she gets difficult—but now there's me to help, and Sis too.

It's Pa who is the chief guardian of the fire, though. I always think of him that way: a tall man sitting cross-legged, frowning anxiously at the fire, his lined face golden in its light, and every so often carefully placing on it a piece of coal from the big heap beside it. Pa tells me there used to be guardians of the fire sometimes in the very old days—vestal

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virgins, he calls them—although there was unfrozen air all around then and you didn't really need one.

He was sitting just that way now, though he got up quick to take the pail from me and bawl me out for loitering—he'd spotted my frozen helmet right off. That roused Ma and she joined in picking on me. She's always trying to get the load off her feelings, Pa explains. He shut her up pretty fast. Sis let off a couple of silly squeals too.

Pa handled the pail of air in a twist of cloth. Now that it was inside the Nest, you could really feel its coldness. It just seemed to suck the heat out of everything. Even the flames cringed away from it as Pa put it down close by the fire.

Yet it's that glimmery white stuff in the pail that keeps us alive. It slowly melts and vanishes and refreshes the Nest and feeds the fire. The blankets keep it from escaping too fast. Pa'd like to seal the whole place, but he can't — building's too earthquake-twisted, and besides he has to leave the chimney open for smoke.

Pa says air is tiny molecules that fly away like a flash if there isn't something to stop them. We have to watch sharp not to let the air run low. Pa always keeps a big reserve supply of it in buckets behind the first blankets, along with extra coal and cans of food and other things, such as pails of snow to melt for water. We have to go way down to the bottom floor for that stuff, which is a mean trip, and get it through a door to outside.

You see, when the Earth got cold, all the water in the air froze first and made a blanket ten feet thick or so everywhere, and then down on top of that dropped the crystals of frozen air, making another white blanket sixty or seventy feet thick maybe.

Of course, all the parts of the air didn't freeze and snow down at the same time.

First to drop out was the carbon dioxide—when you're shoveling for water, you have to make sure you don't go too high and get any of that stuff mixed in, for it would put you to sleep, maybe for good, and make the fire go out. Next there's the nitrogen, which doesn't count one way or the other, though it's the biggest part of the blanket. On top of that and easy to get at, which is lucky for us, there's the oxygen that keeps us alive. Pa says we live better than kings ever did, breathing pure oxygen, but we're used to it and don't notice. Finally, at the very top, there's a slick of liquid helium, which is funny stuff. All of these gases in neat separate layers. Like a pussy

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caffay, Pa laughingly says, whatever that is.

I WAS busting to tell them all about what I'd seen, and so as soon as I'd ducked out of my helmet and while I was still climbing out of my suit, I cut loose. Right away Ma got nervous and began making eyes at the entry-slit in the blankets and wringing her hands together—the hand where she'd lost three fingers from frostbite inside the good one, as usual. I could tell that Pa was annoyed at me scaring her and wanted to explain it all away quickly, yet could see I wasn't fooling.

"And you watched this light for some time, son?" he asked when I finished.

I hadn't said anything about first thinking it was a young lady's face. Somehow that part embarrassed me.

"Long enough for it to pass five windows and go to the next floor."

"And it didn't look like stray electricity or crawling liquid or starlight focused by a growing crystal, or anything like that?"

He wasn't just making up those ideas. Odd things happen in a world that's about as cold as can be, and just when you think matter would be frozen dead, it takes on a strange new life. A slimy stuff comes crawling toward the Nest, just like an animal snuffing for heat—that's the liquid helium. And once, when I was little, a bolt of lightning—not even Pa could figure where it came from—hit the nearby steeple and crawled up and down it for weeks, until the glow finally died.

"Not like anything I ever saw," I told him.

He stood for a moment frowning. Then, "I'll go out with you, and you show it to me," he said.

Ma raised a howl at the idea of being left alone, and Sis joined in, too, but Pa quieted them. We started climbing into our outside clothes—mine had been warming by the fire. Pa made them. They have plastic headpieces that were once big double-duty transparent food cans, but they keep heat and air in and can replace the air for a little while, long enough for our trips for water and coal and food and so on.

Ma started moaning again, "I've always known there was something outside there, waiting to get us. I've felt it for years—something that's part of the cold and hates all warmth and wants to destroy the Nest. It's been watching us all this time, and now it's coming after us. It'll get you and then come for me. Don't go, Harry!"

Pa had everything on but his helmet. He knelt by the fireplace and reached in and shook the long metal rod that goes up the

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chimney and knocks off the ice that keeps trying to clog it. Once a week he goes up on the roof to check if it's working all right. That's our worst trip and Pa won't let me make it alone.

"Sis," Pa said quietly, "come watch the fire. Keep an eye on the air, too. If it gets low or doesn't seem to be boiling fast enough, fetch another bucket from behind the blanket. But mind your hands. Use the cloth to pick up the bucket."

Sis quit helping Ma be frightened and came over and did as she was told. Ma quieted down pretty suddenly, though her eyes were still kind of wild as she watched Pa fix on his helmet tight and pick up a pail and the two of us go out.

PA led the way and I took hold of his belt. It's a funny thing, I'm not afraid to go by myself, but when Pa's along I always want to hold on to him. Habit, I guess, and then there's no denying that this time I was a bit scared.

You see, it's this way. We know that everything is dead out there. Pa heard the last radio voices fade away years ago, and had seen some of the last folks die who weren't as lucky or well-protected as us. So we knew that if there was something groping around out there, it couldn't be anything human or friendly.

Besides that, there's a feeling that comes with it always being night, *cold* night. Pa says there used to be some of that feeling even in the old days, but then every morning the Sun would come and chase it away. I have to take his word for that, not ever remembering the Sun as being anything more than a big star. You see, I hadn't been born when the dark star snatched us away from the Sun, and by now it's dragged us out beyond the orbit of the planet Pluto, Pa says, and taking us farther out all the time.

I found myself wondering whether there mightn't be something on the dark star that wanted us, and if that was why it had captured the Earth. Just then we came to the end of the corridor and I followed Pa out on the balcony.

I don't know what the city looked like in the old days, but now it's beautiful. The starlight lets you see it pretty well—there's quite a bit of light in those steady points speckling the blackness above. (Pa says the stars used to twinkle once, but that was because there was air.) We are on a hill and the shimmery plain drops away from us and then flattens out, cut up into neat squares by the troughs that used to be streets. I sometimes make

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my mashed potatoes look like it, before I pour on the gravy.

Some taller buildings push up out of the feathery plain, topped by rounded caps of air crystals, like the fur hood Ma wears, only whiter. On those buildings you can see the darker squares of windows, underlined by white dashes of air crystals. Some of them are on a slant, for many of the buildings are pretty badly twisted by the quakes and all the rest that happened when the dark star captured the Earth.

Here and there a few icicles hang, water icicles from the first days of the cold, other icicles of frozen air that melted on the roofs and dripped and froze again. Sometimes one of those icicles will catch the light of a star and send it to you so brightly you think the star has swooped into the city. That was one of the things Pa had been thinking of when I told him about the light, but I had thought of it myself first and known it wasn't so.

He touched his helmet to mine so we could talk easier and he asked me to point out the windows to him. But there wasn't any light moving around inside them now, or anywhere else. To my surprise, Pa didn't bawl me out and tell me I'd been seeing things. He looked all around quite a while after filling his pail, and just as we were going inside he whipped around without warning, as if to take some peeping thing off guard.

I could feel it, too. The old peace was gone. There was something lurking out there, watching, waiting, getting ready.

Inside, he said to me, touching helmets, "If you see something like that again, son, don't tell the others. Your Ma's sort of nervous these days and we owe her all the feeling of safety we can give her. Once—it was when your sister was born—I was ready to give up and die, but your Mother kept me trying. Another time she kept the fire going a whole week all by herself when I was sick. Nursed me and took care of the two of you, too.

"YOU know that game we sometimes play, sitting in a square in the Nest, tossing a ball around? Courage is like a ball, son. A person can hold it only so long, and then he's got to toss it to someone else. When it's tossed your way, you've got to catch it and hold it tight — and hope there'll be someone else to toss it to when you get tired of being brave."

His talking to me that way made me feel grown-up and good. But it didn't wipe away the thing outside from the back of my mind—or the fact that Pa took it seriously.

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IT'S hard to hide your feelings about such a thing. When we got back in the Nest and took off our outside clothes, Pa laughed about it all and told them it was nothing and kidded me for having such an imagination, but his words fell flat. He didn't convince Ma and Sis any more than he did me. It looked for a minute like we were all fumbling the courage-ball. Something had to be done, and almost before I knew what I was going to say, I heard myself asking Pa to tell us about the old days, and how it all happened.

He sometimes doesn't mind telling that story, and Sis and I sure like to listen to it, and he got my idea. So we were all settled around the fire in a wink, and Ma pushed up some cans to thaw for supper, and Pa began. Before he did, though, I noticed him casually get a hammer from the shelf and lay it down beside him.

It was the same old story as always—I think I could recite the main thread of it in my sleep—though Pa always puts in a new detail or two and keeps improving it in spots.

He told us how the Earth had been swinging around the Sun ever so steady and warm, and the people on it fixing to make money and wars and have a good time and get power and treat each other right or wrong, when without warning there comes charging out of space this dead star, this burned out sun, and upsets everything.

You know, I find it hard to believe in the way those people felt, any more than I can believe in the swarming number of them. Imagine people getting ready for the horrible sort of war they were cooking up. Wanting it even, or at least wishing it were over so as to end their nervousness. As if all folks didn't have to hang together and pool every bit of warmth just to keep alive. And how can they have hoped to end danger, any more than we can hope to end the cold?

Sometimes I think Pa exaggerates and makes things out too black. He's cross with us once in a while and was probably cross with all those folks. Still, some of the things I read in the old magazines sound pretty wild. He may be right.

THE dark star, as Pa went on telling it, rushed in pretty fast and there wasn't much time to get ready. At the beginning they tried to keep it a secret from most people, but then the truth came out, what with the earthquakes and floods — imagine, oceans of *unfrozen* water!—and people seeing stars blotted out by something on a clear night. First

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off they thought it would hit the Sun, and then they thought it would hit the Earth. There was even the start of a rush to get to a place called China, because people thought the star would hit on the other side. But then they found it wasn't going to hit either side, but was going to come very close to the Earth.

Most of the other planets were on the other side of the Sun and didn't get involved. The Sun and the newcomer fought over the Earth for a little while—pulling it this way and that, like two dogs growling over a bone, Pa described it this time—and then the newcomer won and carried us off. The Sun got a consolation prize, though. At the last minute he managed to hold on to the Moon.

That was the time of the monster earthquakes and floods, twenty times worse than anything before. It was also the time of the Big Jerk, as Pa calls it, when all Earth got yanked suddenly, just as Pa has done to me once or twice, grabbing me by the collar to do it, when I've been sitting too far from the fire.

You see, the dark star was going through space faster than the Sun, and in the opposite direction, and it had to wrench the world considerably in order to take it away.

The Big Jerk didn't last long. It was over as soon as the Earth was settled down in its new orbit around the dark star. But it was pretty terrible while it lasted. Pa says that all sorts of cliffs and buildings toppled, oceans slopped over, swamps and sandy deserts gave great sliding surges that buried nearby lands. Earth was almost jerked out of its atmosphere blanket and the air got so thin in spots that people keeled over and fainted — though of course, at the same time, they were getting knocked down by the Big Jerk and maybe their bones broke or skulls cracked.

We've often asked Pa how people acted during that time, whether they were scared or brave or crazy or stunned, or all four, but he's sort of leery of the subject, and he was again tonight. He says he was mostly too busy to notice.

You see, Pa and some scientist friends of his had figured out part of what was going to happen—they'd known we'd get captured and our air would freeze—and they'd been working like mad to fix up a place with airtight walls and doors, and insulation against the cold, and big supplies of food and fuel and water and bottled air. But the place got smashed in the last earthquakes and all Pa's friends were killed then and in the Big Jerk. So he had to start over and throw the Nest together quick without any advantages,

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just using any stuff he could lay his hands on.

I guess he's telling pretty much the truth when he says he didn't have any time to keep an eye on how other folks behaved, either then or in the Big Freeze that followed — followed very quick, you know, both because the dark star was pulling us away very fast and because Earth's rotation had been slowed in the tug-of-war, so that the nights were ten old nights long.

Still, I've got an idea of some of the things that happened from the frozen folk I've seen, a few of them in other rooms in our building, others clustered around the furnaces in the basements where we go for coal.

In one of the rooms, an old man sits stiff in a chair, with an arm and a leg in splints. In another, a man and woman are huddled together in a bed with heaps of covers over them. You can just see their heads peeking out, close together. And in another a beautiful young lady is sitting with a pile of wraps huddled around her, looking hopefully toward the door, as if waiting for someone who never came back with warmth and food. They're all still and stiff as statues, of course, but just like life.

Pa showed them to me once in quick winks of his flashlight, when he still had a fair supply of batteries and could afford to waste a little light. They scared me pretty bad and made my heart pound, especially the young lady.

NOW, with Pa telling his story for the umpteenth time to take our minds off another scare, I got to thinking of the frozen folk again. All of a sudden I got an idea that scared me worse than anything yet. You see, I'd just remembered the face I'd thought I'd seen in the window. I'd forgotten about that on account of trying to hide it from the others.

What, I asked myself, if the frozen folk were coming to life? What if they were like the liquid helium that got a new lease on life and started crawling toward the heat just when you thought its molecules ought to freeze solid forever? Or like the electricity that moves endlessly when it's just about as cold as that? What if the ever-growing cold, with the temperature creeping down the last few degrees to the last zero, had mysteriously wakened the frozen folk to life—not warm-blooded life, but something icy and horrible?

That was a worse idea than the one about something coming down from the dark star to get us.

Or maybe, I thought, both ideas might be true. Something

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coming down from the dark star and making the frozen folk move, using them to do its work. That would fit with both things I'd seen—the beautiful young lady and the moving, starlike light.

The frozen folk with minds from the dark star behind their unwinking eyes, creeping, crawling, snuffing their way, following the heat to the Nest.

I tell you, that thought gave me a very bad turn and I wanted very badly to tell the others my fears, but I remembered what Pa had said and clenched my teeth and didn't speak.

We were all sitting very still. Even the fire was burning silently. There was just the sound of Pa's voice and the clocks.

And then, from beyond the blankets, I thought I heard a tiny noise. My skin tightened all over me.

Pa was telling about the early years in the Nest and had come to the place where he philosophizes.

"So I asked myself then," he said, "what's the use of going on? What's the use of dragging it out for a few years? Why prolong a doomed existence of hard work and cold and loneliness? The human race is done. The Earth is done. Why not give up, I asked myself—and all of a sudden I got the answer."

Again I heard the noise, louder this time, a kind of uncertain, shuffling tread, coming closer. I couldn't breathe.

"Life's always been a business of working hard and fighting the cold," Pa was saying. "The earth's always been a lonely place, millions of miles from the next planet. And no matter how long the human race might have lived, the end would have come some night. Those things don't matter. What matters is that life is good. It has a lovely texture, like some rich cloth or fur, or the petals of flowers—you've seen pictures of those, but I can't describe how they feel—or the fire's glow. It makes everything else worth while. And that's as true for the last man as the first."

And still the steps kept shuffling closer. It seemed to me that the inmost blanket trembled and bulged a little. Just as if they were burned into my imagination, I kept seeing those peering, frozen eyes.

"So right then and there," Pa went on, and now I could tell that he heard the steps, too, and was talking loud so we maybe wouldn't hear them, "right then and there I told myself that I was going on as if we had all eternity ahead of us. I'd have children and teach them all I could. I'd get them to read books. I'd plan for the future, try to enlarge and seal the Nest. I'd do what I could

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to keep everything beautiful and growing. I'd keep alive my feeling of wonder even at the cold and the dark and the distant stars."

But then the blanket actually did move and lift. And there was a bright light somewhere behind it. Pa's voice stopped and his eyes turned to the widening slit and his hand went out until it touched and gripped the handle of the hammer beside him.

IN through the blanket stepped the beautiful young lady. She stood there looking at us the strangest way, and she carried something bright and unwinking in her hand. And two other faces peered over her shoulders—men's faces, white and staring.

Well, my heart couldn't have been stopped for more than four or five beats before I realized she was wearing a suit and helmet like Pa's homemade ones, only fancier, and that the men were, too—and that the frozen folk certainly wouldn't be wearing those. Also, I noticed that the bright thing in her hand was just a kind of flashlight.

The silence kept on while I swallowed hard a couple of times, and after that there was all sorts of jabbering and commotion.

They were simply people, you see. We hadn't been the only ones to survive; we'd just thought so, for natural enough reasons. These three people had survived, and quite a few others with them. And when we found out *how* they'd survived, Pa let out the biggest whoop of joy.

They were from Los Alamos and they were getting their heat and power from atomic energy. Just using the uranium and plutonium intended for bombs, they had enough to go on for thousands of years. They had a regular little airtight city, with airlocks and all. They even generated electric light and grew plants and animals by it. (At this Pa let out a second whoop, waking Ma from her faint.)

But if we were flabbergasted at them, they were double-flabbergasted at us.

One of the men kept saying, "But it's impossible, I tell you. You can't maintain an air supply without hermetic sealing. It's simply impossible."

That was after he had got his helmet off and was using our air. Meanwhile, the young lady kept looking around at us as if we were saints, and telling us we'd done something amazing, and suddenly she broke down and cried.

They'd been scouting around for survivors, but they never expected to find any in a place like this. They had rocket ships at Los Alamos and plenty of chem-

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ical fuel. As for liquid oxygen, all you had to do was go out and shovel the air blanket at the top level. So after they'd got things going smoothly at Los Alamos, which had taken years, they'd decided to make some trips to likely places where there might be other survivors. No good trying long-distance radio signals, of course, since there was no atmosphere to carry them around the curve of the Earth.

Well, they'd found other colonies at Argonne and Brookhaven and way around the world at Harwell and Tanna Tuva. And now they'd been giving our city a look, not really expecting to find anything. But they had an instrument that noticed the faintest heat waves and it had told them there was something warm down here, so they'd landed to investigate. Of course we hadn't heard them land, since there was no air to carry the sound, and they'd had to investigate around quite a while before finding us. Their instruments had given them a wrong steer and they'd wasted some time in the building across the street.

BY now, all five adults were talking like sixty. Pa was demonstrating to the men how he worked the fire and got rid of the ice in the chimney and all that. Ma had perked up wonderfully and was showing the young lady her cooking and sewing stuff, and even asking about how the women dressed at Los Alamos. The strangers marveled at everything and praised it to the skies. I could tell from the way they wrinkled their noses that they found the Nest a bit smelly, but they never mentioned that at all and just asked bushels of questions.

In fact, there was so much talking and excitement that Pa forgot about things, and it wasn't until they were all getting groggy that he looked and found the air had all boiled away in the pail. He got another bucket of air quick from behind the blankets. Of course that started them all laughing and jabbering again. The newcomers even got a little drunk. They weren't used to so much oxygen.

Funny thing, though—I didn't do much talking at all and Sis hung on to Ma all the time and hid her face when anybody looked at her. I felt pretty uncomfortable and disturbed myself, even about the young lady. Glimpsing her outside there, I'd had all sorts of mushy thoughts, but now I was just embarrassed and scared of her, even though she tried to be nice as anything to me.

I sort of wished they'd all quit crowding the Nest and let us be

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alone and get our feelings straightened out.

And when the newcomers began to talk about our all going to Los Alamos, as if that were taken for granted, I could see that something of the same feeling struck Pa and Ma, too. Pa got very silent all of a sudden and Ma kept telling the young lady, "But I wouldn't know how to act there and I haven't any clothes."

The strangers were puzzled like anything at first, but then they got the idea. As Pa kept saying, "It just doesn't seem right to let this fire go out."

WELL, the strangers are gone, but they're coming back. It hasn't been decided yet just what will happen. Maybe the Nest will be kept up as what one of the strangers called a "survival school." Or maybe we will join the pioneers who are going to try to establish a new colony at the uranium mines at Great Slave Lake or in the Congo.

Of course, now that the strangers are gone, I've been thinking a lot about Los Alamos and those other tremendous colonies. I have a hankering to see them for myself.

You ask me, Pa wants to see them, too. He's been getting pretty thoughtful, watching Ma and Sis perk up.

"It's different, now that we know others are alive," he explains to me. "Your mother doesn't feel so hopeless any more. Neither do I, for that matter, not having to carry the whole responsibility for keeping the human race going, so to speak. It scares a person."

I looked around at the blanket walls and the fire and the pails of air boiling away and Ma and Sis sleeping in the warmth and the flickering light.

"It's not going to be easy to leave the Nest," I said, wanting to cry, kind of. "It's so small and there's just the four of us. I get scared at the idea of big places and a lot of strangers."

He nodded and put another piece of coal on the fire. Then he looked at the little pile and grinned suddenly and put a couple of handfuls on, just as if it was one of our birthdays or Christmas.

"You'll quickly get over that feeling son," he said. "The trouble with the world was that it kept getting smaller and smaller, till it ended with just the Nest. Now it'll be good to have a real huge world again, the way it was in the beginning."

I guess he's right. You think the beautiful young lady will wait for me till I grow up? I'll be twenty in only ten years.

—FRITZ LEIBER

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With These Hands

By C. M. KORNBLUTH

I

HALVORSEN waited in the Chancery office while Monsignor Reedy disposed of three persons who had preceded him. He was a little dizzy with hunger and noticed only vaguely that the prelate's secretary was beckoning to him. He started to his feet when the secretary pointedly opened the door to Monsignor Reedy's inner office and stood waiting beside it.

The artist crossed the floor, forgetting that he had leaned his portfolio against his chair, remembered at the door and went back for it, flushing. The secretary looked patient.

"Thanks," Halvorsen murmured to him as the door closed.

There was something wrong with the prelate's manner.

"I've brought the designs for the Stations, Padre," he said, opening the portfolio on the desk.

"Bad news, Roald," said the monsignor. "I know how you've been looking forward to the commission—"

"Somebody else get it?" asked the artist faintly, leaning against the desk. "I thought his eminence

Illustrated by KARL ROGERS

No self-respecting artist can object to suffering for his art . . . but not in a society where art is outdated by technology!

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definitely decided I had the—"

"It's not that," said the monsignor. "But the Sacred Congregation of Rites this week made a pronouncement on images of devotion. Stereopantograph is to be licit within a diocese at the discretion of the bishop. And his eminence—"

"S.P.G. — slimy imitations," protested Halvorsen. "Real as a plastic eye. No texture. No guts. *You* know that, Padre!" he said accusingly.

"I'm sorry, Roald," said the monsignor. "Your work is better than we'll get from a stereopantograph—to my eyes, at least. But there are other considerations."

"Money!" spat the artist.

"Yes, money," the prelate admitted. "His eminence wants to see the St. Xavier U. building program through before he dies. Is that a mortal sin? And there are our schools, our charities, our Venus mission. S.P.G. will mean a considerable saving on procurement and maintenance of devotional images. Even if I could, I would not disagree with his eminence on adopting it as a matter of diocesan policy."

The prelate's eyes fell on the detailed drawings of the Stations of the Cross and lingered.

"Your St. Veronica," he said abstractedly. "Very fine. It suggests one of Caravaggio's careworn saints to me. I would have liked to see her in the bronze."

"So would I," said Halvorsen hoarsely. "Keep the drawings, Padre." He started for the door.

"But I can't—"

"That's all right."

The artist walked past the secretary blindly and out of the Chancery into Fifth Avenue's spring sunlight. He hoped Monsignor Reedy was enjoying the drawings and was ashamed of himself and sorry for Halvorsen. And he was glad he didn't have to carry the heavy portfolio any more. Everything seemed so heavy lately — chisels, hammer, wooden palette. Maybe the padre would send him something and pretend it was for expenses or an advance, as he had in the past.

Halvorsen's feet carried him up the Avenue. No, there wouldn't be any advances any more. The last steady trickle of income had just been dried up, by an announcement in *Osservatore Romano*. Religious conservatism had carried the church as far as it would go in its ancient role of art patron.

When all Europe was writing on the wonderful new vellum, the church stuck to good old papyrus. When all Europe was writing on the wonderful new paper, the church stuck to good old vellum. When all architects and municipal monument committees and portrait bust clients were patron-

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izing the stereopantograph, the church stuck to good old expensive sculpture. But not any more.

He was passing an S.P.G. salon now, where one of his Tuesday night pupils worked: one of the few men in the classes. Mostly they consisted of lazy, moody, irritable girls. Halvorsen, surprised at himself, entered the salon, walking between asthenic seminude stereos executed in transparent plastic that made the skin of his neck and shoulders prickle with gooseflesh.

Slime! he thought. *How can they—*

"May I help—oh, hello, Roald. What brings you here?"

He knew suddenly what had brought him there. "Could you make a little advance on next month's tuition, Lewis? I'm strapped." He took a nervous look around the chamber of horrors, avoiding the man's condescending face.

"I guess so, Roald. Would ten dollars be any help? That'll carry us through to the 25th, right?"

"Fine, right, sure," he said, while he was being unwillingly towed around the place.

"I know you don't think much of S.P.G., but it's quiet now, so this is a good chance to see how we work. I don't say it's Art with a capital A, but you've got to admit it's *an* art, something people like at a price they can afford to pay. Here's where we sit them. Then you run out the feelers to the reference points on the face. You know what they are?"

He heard himself say dryly: "I know what they are. The Egyptian sculptors used them when they carved statues of the pharaohs."

"Yes? I never knew that. There's nothing new under the Sun, is there? But *this* is the heart of the S.P.G." The youngster proudly swung open the door of an electronic device in the wall of the portrait booth. Tubes winked sullenly at Halvorsen.

"The esthetikon?" he asked indifferently. He did not feel indifferent, but it would be absurd to show anger, no matter how much he felt it, against a mindless aggregation of circuits that could calculate layouts, criticize and correct pictures for a desired effect—and that had put the artist of design out of a job.

"Yes. The lenses take sixteen profiles, you know, and we set the esthetikon for whatever we want—cute, rugged, sexy, spiritual, brainy, or a combination. It fairs curves from profile to profile to give us just what we want, distorts the profiles themselves within limits if it has to, and there's your portrait stored in the memory tank waiting to be taped. You set your ratio for any

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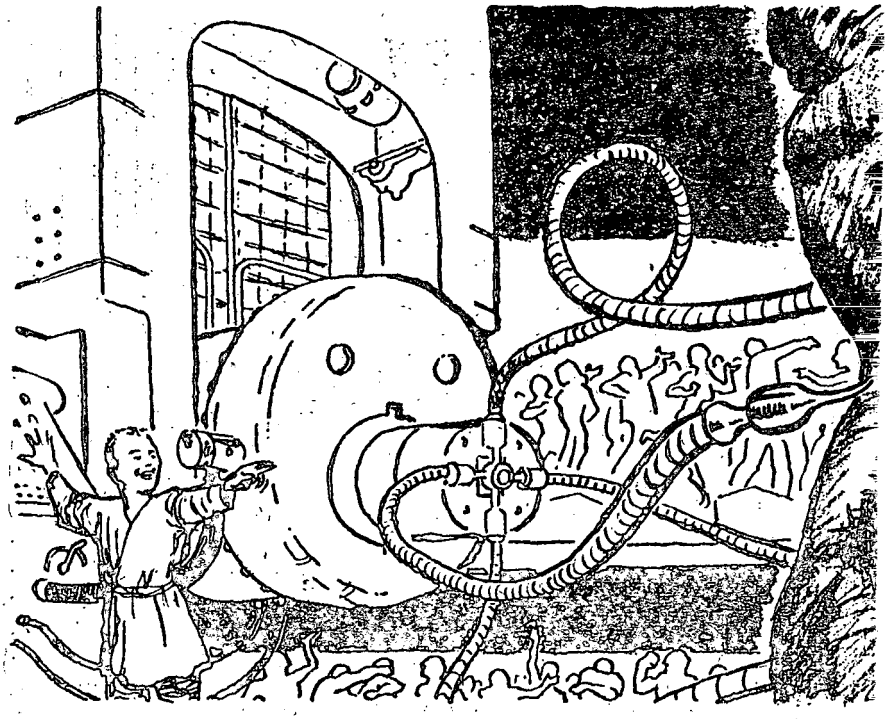

enlargement or reduction you want and play it back. I wish we were reproducing today; it's fascinating to watch. You just pour in your cold-set plastic, the nozzles ooze out a core and start crawling over to scan—a drop here, a worm there, and it begins to take shape.

"We mostly do portrait busts here, the Avenue trade, but Wilgus, the foreman, used to work in a monument shop in Brooklyn. He did that heroic-size war memorial on the East River Drive—hired Garda Bouchette, the TV girl, for the central figure. And what a figure! He told me he set the esthetikon plates for three-quarter sexy, one-quarter spiritual. Here's something interesting—standing figurine of Orin Ryerson, the banker. He ordered twelve. Figurines are coming in. The girls like them because they can show their shapes. You'd be surprised at some of the poses they want to try—"

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SOMEHOW, Halvorsen got out with the ten dollars, walked to Sixth Avenue and sat down hard in a cheap restaurant. He had coffee and dozed a little, waking with a guilty start at a racket across the street. There was a building going up. For a while he watched the great machines pour walls and floors, the workmen rolling here and there on their little chariots to weld on a wall panel, stripe on an electric circuit of conductive ink, or spray plastic finish over the "wired" wall, all without leaving the saddles of their little mechanical chariots.

Halvorsen felt more determined. He bought a paper from a vending machine by the restaurant door, drew another cup of coffee and turned to the help-wanted ads.

The tricky trade-school ads urged him to learn construction work and make big money. Be a plumbing-machine setup man. Be

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a house-wiring machine tender. Be a servotruck driver. Be a lumber-stacker operator. Learn pouring-machine maintenance.

Make big money!

A sort of panic overcame him. He ran to the phone booth and dialed a Passaic number. He heard the *ring-ring-ring* and strained to hear old Mr. Krehbeil's stumping footsteps growing louder as he neared the phone, even though he knew he would hear nothing until the receiver was picked up.

RING - ring - ring. "Hello?" grunted the old man's voice, and his face appeared on the little screen. "Hello, Mr. Halvorsen. What can I do for you?"

Halvorsen was tongue-tied. He couldn't possibly say: I just wanted to see if you were still there. I was afraid you weren't there any more. He choked and improvised: "Hello, Mr. Krehbeil. It's about the banister on the stairs in my place. I noticed it's pretty shaky. Could you come over sometime and fix it for me?"

Krehbeil peered suspiciously out of the screen. "I could do that," he said slowly. "I don't have much work nowadays. But you can carpenter as good as me, Mr. Halvorsen, and frankly you're very slow pay and I like cabinet work better. I'm not a young man and climbing around on ladders takes it out of me. If you can't find anybody else, I'll take the work, but I got to have some of the money first, just for the materials. It isn't easy to get good wood any more."

"All right," said Halvorsen. "Thanks, Mr. Krehbeil. I'll call you if I can't get anybody else."

He hung up and went back to his table and newspaper. His face was burning with anger at the old man's reluctance and his own foolish panic. Krehbeil didn't realize they were both in the same leaky boat. Krehbeil, who didn't get a job in a month, still thought with senile pride that he was a journeyman carpenter and cabinetmaker who could make his solid way anywhere with his toolbox and his skill, and that he could afford to look down on anything as disreputable as an artist—even an artist who could carpenter as well as he did himself.

Labuerre had made Halvorsen learn carpentry, and Labuerre had been right. You build a scaffold so you can sculp up high, not so it will collapse and you break a leg. You build your platforms so they hold the rock steady, not so it wobbles and chatters at every blow of the chisel. You build your armatures so they hold the plasticine you slam onto them.

But the help-wanted ads wanted no builders of scaffolds,

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platforms and armatures. The factories were calling for setup men and maintenance men for the production and assembly machines.

From upstate, General Vegetables had sent a recruiting team for farm help—harvest setup and maintenance men, a few openings for experienced operators of tank-caulking machinery. Under "office and professional" the demand was heavy for computer men, for girls who could run the I.B.M. Letteriter, esp. familiar sales and collections corresp., for office machinery maintenance and repair men. A job printing house wanted an esthetikon operator for letterhead layouts and the like. A.T. & T. wanted trainees to earn while learning telephone maintenance. A direct-mail advertising outfit wanted an artist—no, they wanted a sales-executive who could scrawl picture-ideas that would be subjected to the criticism and correction of the esthetikon.

Halvorsen leafed tiredly through the rest of the paper. He knew he wouldn't get a job, and if he did he wouldn't hold it. He knew it was a terrible thing to admit to yourself that you might starve to death because you were bored by anything except art, but he admitted it.

It had happened often enough in the past—artists undergoing preposterous hardships, not, as people thought, because they were devoted to art, but because nothing else was interesting. If there were only some impressive, sonorous word that summed up the aching, oppressive futility that overcame him when he tried to get out of art—only there wasn't.

He thought he could tell which of the photos in the tabloid had been corrected by the esthetikon.

There was a shot of Jink Bitsy, who was to star in a remake of *Peter Pan*. Her ears had been made to look not pointed but pointy, her upper lip had been lengthened a trifle, her nose had been pugged a little and tilted quite a lot, her freckles were cuter than cute, her brows were innocently arched, and her lower lip and eyes were nothing less than pornography.

There was a shot, apparently uncorrected, of the last Venus ship coming in at La Guardia and the average-looking explorers grinning. Caption: "Austin Malone and crew smile relief on safe arrival. Malone says Venus colonies need men, machines. See story p. 2."

Petulantly, Halvorsen threw the paper under the table and walked out. What had space travel to do with him? Vacations on the Moon and expeditions to Venus and Mars were part of the

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deadly encroachment on his livelihood and no more.

II

HE took the subway to Passaic and walked down a long-still traffic beltway to his studio, almost the only building alive in the slums near the rusting railroad freightyard.

A sign that had once said "F. Labuerre, Sculptor — Portraits and Architectural Commissions" now said "Roald Halvorsen; Art Classes — Reasonable Fees." It was a grimy two-story frame building with a shopfront in which were mounted some of his students' charcoal figure studies and oil still-lifes. He lived upstairs, taught downstairs front, and did his own work downstairs, back behind dirty, ceiling-high drapes.

Going in, he noticed that he had forgotten to lock the door again. He slammed it bitterly. At the noise, somebody called from behind the drapes: "Who's that?"

"Halvorsen!" he yelled in a sudden fury. "I live here. I own this place. Come out of there! What do you want?"

There was a fumbling at the drapes and a girl stepped between them, shrinking from their dirt.

"Your door was open," she said firmly, "and it's a shop. I've just been here a couple of minutes. I came to ask about classes, but I don't think I'm interested if you're this bad-tempered."

A pupil. Pupils were never to be abused, especially not now.

"I'm terribly sorry," he said. "I had a trying day in the city." Now turn it on. "I wouldn't tell everybody a terrible secret like this, but I've lost a commission. You understand? I thought so. Anybody who'd traipse out here to my dingy abode would be *simpatica*. Won't you sit down? No, not there—humor an artist and sit over there. The warm background of that still-life brings out your color—quite good color. Have you ever been painted? You've a very interesting face, you know. Some day I'd like to—but you mentioned classes.

"We have figure classes, male and female models alternating, on Tuesday nights. For that I have to be very stern and ask you to sign up for an entire course of twelve lessons at sixty dollars. It's the models' fees—they're exorbitant. Saturday afternoons we have still-life classes for beginners in oils. That's only two dollars a class, but you might sign up for a series of six and pay ten dollars in advance, which saves you two whole dollars. I also give private instructions to a few talented amateurs."

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The price was open on that one — whatever the traffic would bear. It had been a year since he'd had a private pupil and she'd taken only six lessons at five dollars an hour.

"The still-life sounds interesting," said the girl, holding her head self-consciously the way they all did when he gave them the patter. It was a good head, carried well up. The muscles clung close, not yet slacked into geotropic loops and lumps. The line of youth is heliotropic, he confusedly thought. "I saw some interesting things back there. Was that your own work?"

She rose, obviously with the expectation of being taken into the studio. Her body was one of those long-lined, small-breasted, coltish jobs that the pre-Raphaelites loved to draw.

"Well—" said Halvorsen. A deliberate show of reluctance and then a bright smile of confidence. "*You'll* understand," he said positively and drew aside the curtains.

"What a curious place!" She wandered about, inspecting the drums of plaster, clay and plasticene, the racks of tools, the stands, the stones, the chisels, the forge, the kiln, the lumber, the glaze bench.

"I *like* this," she said determinedly, picking up a figure a half-meter tall, a Venus he had cast in bronze while studying under Labuerre some years ago. "How much is it?"

An honest answer would scare her off, and there was no chance in the world that she'd buy. "I hardly ever put my things up for sale," he told her lightly. "That was just a little study. I do work on commission only nowadays."

Her eyes flicked about the dingy room, seeming to take in its scaling plaster and warped floor and see through the wall to the abandoned slum in which it was set. There was amusement in her glance.

I am not being honest, she thinks. She thinks that is funny. Very well, I will be honest. "Six hundred dollars," he said flatly.

THE girl set the figurine on its stand with a rap and said, half angry and half amused: "I don't understand it. That's more than a month's pay for me. I could get an S.P.G. statuette just as pretty as this for ten dollars. Who do you artists think you are, anyway?"

Halvorsen debated with himself about what he could say in reply:

An S.P.G. operator spends a week learning his skill and I spend a lifetime learning mine.

An S.P.G. operator makes a mechanical copy of a human

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form distorted by formulae mechanically arrived at from psychotests of population samples. I take full responsibility for my work; it is mine, though I use what I see fit from Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Augustan and Romantic and Modern Eras.

An S.P.G. operator works in soft, homogeneous plastic; I work in bronze that is more complicated than you dream, that is cast and acid-dipped today so it will slowly take on rich and subtle coloring many years from today.

An S.P.G. operator could not make an Orpheus Fountain—

He mumbled, "Orpheus," and keeled over.

HALVORSEN awoke in his bed on the second floor of the building. His fingers and toes buzzed electrically and he felt very clear-headed. The girl and a man, unmistakably a doctor, were watching him.

"You don't seem to belong to any Medical Plans, Halvorsen," the doctor said irritably. "There weren't any cards on you at all. No Red, no Blue, no Green, no Brown."

"I used to be on the Green Plan, but I let it lapse," the artist said defensively.

"And look what happened!"

"Stop nagging him!" the girl said. "I'll pay you your fee."

"It's supposed to come through a Plan," the doctor fretted.

"We won't tell anybody," the girl promised. "Here's five dollars. Just stop nagging him."

"Malnutrition," said the doctor. "Normally I'd send him to a hospital, but I don't see how I could manage it. He isn't on any Plan at all. Look, I'll take the money and leave some vitamins. That's what he needs—vitamins. And food."

"I'll see that he eats," the girl said, and the doctor left.

"How long since you've had anything?" she asked Halvorsen.

"I had some coffee today," he answered, thinking back. "I'd been working on detail drawings for a commission and it fell through. I told you that. It was a shock."

"I'm Lucretia Grumman," she said, and went out.

He dozed until she came back with an armful of groceries.

"It's hard to get around down here," she complained.

"It was Labuerre's studio," he told her defiantly. "He left it to me when he died. Things weren't so rundown in his time. I studied under him; he was one of the last. He had a joke—'They don't really want my stuff, but they're ashamed to let me starve.' He warned me that they wouldn't be ashamed to let *me* starve, but I

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insisted and he took me in."

Halvorsen drank some milk and ate some bread. He thought of the change from the ten dollars in his pocket and decided not to mention it. Then he remembered that the doctor had gone through his pockets.

"I can pay you for this," he said. "It's very kind of you, but you mustn't think I'm penniless. I've just been too preoccupied to take care of myself."

"Sure," said the girl. "But we can call this an advance. I want to sign up for some classes."

"Be happy to have you."

"Am I bothering you?" asked the girl. "You said something odd when you fainted — 'Orpheus.' "

"Did I say that? I must have been thinking of Milles' Orpheus Fountain in Copenhagen. I've seen photos, but I've never been there."

"Germany? But there's nothing left of Germany."

"Copenhagen's in Denmark. There's quite a lot of Denmark left. It was only on the fringes. Heavily radiated, but still there."

"I want to travel, too," she said. "I work at La Guardia and I've never been off, except for an orbiting excursion. I want to go to the Moon on my vacation. They give us a bonus in travel vouchers. It must be wonderful dancing under the low gravity."

Spaceport? Off? Low gravity? Terms belonging to the detested electronic world of the stereopantograph in which he had no place.

"Be very interesting," he said, closing his eyes to conceal disgust.

"I *am* bothering you. I'll go away now, but I'll be back Tuesday night for the class. What time do I come and what should I bring?"

"Eight. It's charcoal — I sell you the sticks and paper. Just bring a smock."

"All right. And I want to take the oils class, too. And I want to bring some people I know to see your work. I'm sure they'll see something they like. Austin Malone's in from Venus—he's a special friend of mine."

"Lucretia," he said. "Or do some people call you Lucy?"

"Lucy."

"Will you take that little bronze you liked? As a thank you?"

"I can't do that!"

"Please. I'd feel much better about this. I really mean it."

She nodded abruptly, flushing, and almost ran from the room.

Now why did I do that? he asked himself. He hoped it was because he liked Lucy Grumman very much. He hoped it wasn't a cold-blooded investment of a piece of sculpture that would never be sold, anyway, just to

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make sure she'd be back with class fees and more groceries.

III

SHE was back on Tuesday, a half-hour early and carrying a smock. He introduced her formally to the others as they arrived: a dozen or so bored young women who, he suspected, talked a great deal about their art lessons outside, but in class used any excuse to stop sketching.

He didn't dare show Lucy any particular consideration. There were fierce little miniature cliques in the class. Halvorsen knew they laughed at him and his line among themselves, and yet, strangely, were fiercely jealous of their seniority and right to individual attention.

The lesson was an ordeal, as usual. The model, a muscle-bound young graduate of the barbell gyms and figure-photography studios, was stupid and argumentative about ten-minute poses. Two of the girls came near a hair-pulling brawl over the rights to a preferred sketching location. A third girl had discovered Picasso's cubist period during the past week and proudly announced that she didn't *feel* perspective in art.

But the two interminable hours finally ticked by. He nagged them into cleaning up—not as bad as the Saturdays with oils — and stood by the open door. Otherwise they would have stayed all night, cackling about absent students and snarling sulkily among themselves. His well-laid plans went sour, though. A large and flashy car drove up as the girls were leaving.

"That's Austin Malone," said Lucy. "He came to pick me up and look at your work."

That was all the wedge her fellow-pupils needed.

"*Aus*-tin Ma-*lone! Well!*"

"Lucy, darling, I'd love to meet a real *spaceman*."

"Roald, darling, would you mind very much if I stayed a moment?"

"I'm certainly not going to miss this and I don't care if you mind or not, Roald, darling!"

Malone was an impressive figure. Halvorsen thought: he looks as though he's been run through an esthetikon set for 'brawny' and 'determined.' Lucy made a hash of the introductions and the spaceman didn't rise to conversational bait dangled enticingly by the girls.

In a clear voice, he said to Halvorsen: "I don't want to take up too much of your time. Lucy tells me you have some things for sale. Is there any place we can look at them where it's quiet?"

The students made sulky exits.

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"Back here," said the artist.

The girl and Malone followed him through the curtains. The spaceman made a slow circuit of the studio, seeming to repel questions.

He sat down at last and said: "I don't know what to think, Halvorsen. This place stuns me. Do you *know* you're in the Dark Ages?"

People who never have given a thought to Chartres and Mont St. Michel usually call it the Dark Ages, Halvorsen thought wryly. He asked, "Technologically, you mean? No, not at all. My plaster's better, my colors are better, my metal is better—tool metal, not casting metal, that is."

"I mean *hand* work," said the spaceman. "Actually working by *hand*."

The artist shrugged. "There have been crazes for the techniques of the boiler works and the machine shop," he admitted. "Some interesting things were done, but they didn't stand up well. Is there anything here that takes your eye?"

"I like those dolphins," said the spaceman, pointing to a perforated terra-cotta relief on the wall. They had been commissioned by an architect, then later refused for reasons of economy when the house had run way over estimate. "They'd look bully over the fireplace in my town apartment. Like them, Lucy?"

"I think they're wonderful," said the girl.

Roald saw the spaceman go rigid with the effort not to turn and stare at her. He loved her and he was jealous.

Roald told the story of the dolphins and said: "The price that the architect thought was too high was three hundred and sixty dollars."

Malone grunted. "Doesn't seem unreasonable—if you set a high store on inspiration."

"I don't know about inspiration," the artist said evenly. "But I was awake for two days and two nights shoveling coal and adjusting drafts to fire that thing in my kiln."

The spaceman looked contemptuous. "I'll take it," he said. "Be something to talk about during those awkward pauses. Tell me, Halvorsen, how's Lucy's work? Do you think she ought to stick with it?"

"Austin," objected the girl, "don't be so blunt. How can he possibly know after one day?"

"She can't draw yet," the artist said cautiously. "It's all coordination, you know—thousands of hours of practice, training your eye and hand to work together until you can put a line on paper where you want it. Lucy, if you're really interested in it, you'll learn to draw well. I don't think any of

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the other students will. They're in it because of boredom or snobbery, and they'll stop before they have their eye-hand coordination."

"I *am* interested," she said firmly.

Malone's determined restraint broke. "Damned right you are. In—" He recovered himself and demanded of Halvorsen: "I understand your point about coordination. But thousands of hours when you can buy a camera? It's absurd."

"I was talking about drawing, not art," replied Halvorsen. "Drawing is putting a line on paper where you want it, I said." He took a deep breath and hoped the great distinction wouldn't sound ludicrous and trivial. "So let's say that art is knowing how to put the line in the right place."

"Be practical. There isn't any art. Not any more. I get around quite a bit and I never see anything but photos and S.P.G.s. A few heirlooms, yes, but nobody's painting or carving any more."

"There's some art, Malone. My students—a couple of them in the still-life class — are quite good. There are more across the country. Art for occupational therapy, or a hobby, or something to do with the hands. There's trade in their work. They sell them to each other, they give them to their friends, they hang them on their walls. There are even some sculptors like that. Sculpture is prescribed by doctors. The occupational therapists say it's even better than drawing and painting, so some of these people work in plasticene and soft stone, and some of them get to be good."

"Maybe so. I'm an engineer, Halvorsen. We glory in doing things the easy way. Doing things the easy way got me to Mars and Venus and it's going to get me to Ganymede. You're doing things the hard way, and your inefficiency has no place in this world. Look at you! You've lost a fingertip—some accident, I suppose."

"I never noticed—" said Lucy, and then let out a faint, "Oh!"

Halvorsen curled the middle finger of his left hand into the palm, where he usually carried it to hide the missing first joint.

"Yes," he said softly. "An accident."

"Accidents are a sign of inadequate mastery of material and equipment," said Malone sententiously. "While you stick to your methods and I stick to mine, *you can't compete with me.*"

His tone made it clear that he was talking about more than engineering.

"Shall we go now, Lucy? Here's my card, Halvorsen. Send those dolphins along and I'll mail you a check."

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IV

THE artist walked the half-dozen blocks to Mr. Krehbeil's place the next day. He found the old man in the basement shop of his fussy house, hunched over his bench with a powerful light overhead. He was trying to file a saw.

"Mr. Krehbeil!" Halvorsen called over the shriek of metal.

The carpenter turned around and peered with watery eyes. "I can't see like I used to," he said querulously. "I go over the same teeth on this damn saw, I skip teeth, I can't see the light shine off it when I got one set. The glare." He banged down his three-cornered file petulantly. "Well, what can I do for you?"

"I need some crating stock. Anything. I'll trade you a couple of my maple four-by-fours."

The old face became cunning. "And will you set my saw? My *saws*, I mean. It's nothing to you—an hour's work. You have the eyes."

Halvorsen said bitterly, "All right." The old man had to drive his bargain, even though he might never use his saws again. And then the artist promptly repented of his bitterness, offering up a quick prayer that his own failure to conform didn't make him as much of a nuisance to the world as Krehbeil was.

The carpenter was pleased as they went through his small stock of wood and chose boards to crate the dolphin relief. He was pleased enough to give Halvorsen coffee and cake before the artist buckled down to filing the saws.

Over the kitchen table, Halvorsen tried to probe. "Things pretty slow now?"

It would be hard to spoil Krehbeil's day now. "People are always fools. They don't know good hand work. Some day," he said apocalyptically, "I laugh on the other side of my face when their foolish machine-buildings go falling down in a strong wind, all of them, all over the country. Even my boy—I used to beat him good, almost every day — he works a foolish concrete machine and his house should fall on his head like the rest."

Halvorsen knew it was Krehbeil's son who supported him by mail, and changed the subject. "You get some cabinet work?"

"Stupid women! What they call antiques—they don't know Meissen, they don't know Biedermeier. They bring me trash to repair sometimes. I make them pay; I swindle them good."

"I wonder if things would be different if there were anything left over in Europe . . ."

"People will still be fools, Mr. Halvorsen," said the carpenter positively. "Didn't you say you

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were going to file those saws today?"

So the artist spent two noisy hours filing before he carried his crating stock to the studio.

LUCY was there. She had brought some things to eat. He dumped the lumber with a bang and demanded: "Why aren't you at work?"

"We get days off," she said vaguely. "Austin thought he'd give me the cash for the terra-cotta and I could give it to you."

She held out an envelope while he studied her silently. The farce was beginning again. But this time he dreaded it.

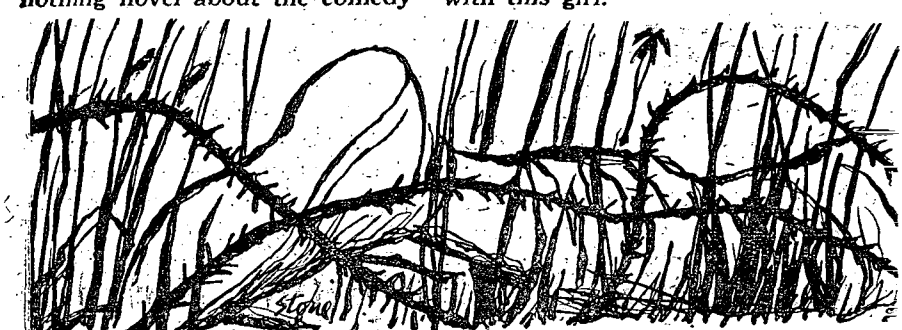
It would not be the first time that a lonesome, discontented girl chose to see him as a combination of romantic rebel and lost pup, with the consequences you'd expect.

He knew from books, experience and Labuerre's conversation in the old days that there was nothing novel about the comedy —that there had even been artists, lots of them, who had counted on endless repetitions of it for their livelihood.

The girl drops in with groceries and the artist is pleasantly surprised; the girl admires this little thing or that after payday and buys it and the artist is pleasantly surprised; the girl brings her friends to take lessons or make little purchases and the artist is pleasantly surprised. The girl may be seduced by the artist or vice versa, which shortens the comedy, or they get married, which lengthens it somewhat.

It had been three years since Halvorsen had last played out the farce with a manic-depressive divorcee from Elmira: three years during which he had crossed the mid-point between thirty and forty; three more years to get beaten down by being unwanted and working too much and eating too little.

Also, he knew, he was in love with this girl.



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He took the envelope, counted three hundred and twenty dollars and crammed it into his pocket. "That was your idea," he said. "Thanks. Now get out, will you? I've got work to do."

She stood there, shocked.

"I said get out. I have work to do."

"Austin was right," she told him miserably. "You don't care how people feel. You just want to get things out of them."

She ran from the studio, and

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Halvorsen fought with himself not to run after her.

He walked slowly into his workship and studied his array of tools, though he paid little attention to his finished pieces. It would be nice to spend about half of this money on open-hearth steel rod and bar stock to forge into chisels; he thought he knew where he could get some—but she would be back, or he would break and go to her and be forgiven and the comedy would be played out, after all.

He couldn't let that happen.

V

ALESUND, on the Atlantic side of the Dourefeld mountains of Norway, was in the lee of the blasted continent. One more archeologist there made no difference, as long as he had the sense to recognize the propellor-like international signposts that said with their three blades, *Radiation Hazard,* and knew what every schoolboy knew about protective clothing and reading a personal Geiger counter.

The car Halvorsen rented was for a brief trip over the mountains to study contaminated Oslo. Well-muffled, he could make it and back in a dozen hours and no harm done.

But he took the car past Oslo; Wennersborg and Goteborg, along the Kattegat coast to Helsingborg, and abandoned it there, among the three-bladed polyglot signs, crossing to Denmark. Danes were as unlike Prussians as they could be, but their unfortunate little peninsula was a sprout off Prussia which radio-cobalt dust couldn't tell from the real thing. The three-bladed signs were most specific.

With a long way to walk along the rubble-littered highways, he stripped off the impregnated coveralls and boots. He had long since shed the noisy counter and the uncomfortable gloves and mask.

The silence was eerie as he limped into Copenhagen at noon. He didn't know whether the radiation was getting to him or whether he was tired and hungry and no more. As though thinking of a stranger, he liked what he was doing.

I'll be my own audience, he thought. *God knows I learned there isn't any other, not any more. You have to know when to stop. Rodin, the dirty old, wonderful old man, knew that. He taught us not to slick it and polish it and smooth it until it looked like liquid instead of bronze and stone. Van Gogh was crazy as a loon, but he knew when to stop and varnish it, and he didn't care if the paint looked like paint instead of looking like*

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sunset clouds or moonbeams. Up in Hartford, Browne and Sharpe stop when they've got a turret lathe; they don't put caryatids on it. I'll stop while my life is a life, before it becomes a thing with distracting embellishments such as a wife who will come to despise me, a succession of gradually less worthwhile pieces that nobody will look at.

Blame nobody, he told himself, lightheadedly.

And then it was in front of him, terminating a vista of weeds and bomb rubble — Milles' Orpheus Fountain.

It took a man, he thought. Esthetikon circuits couldn't do it. There was a gross mixture of styles, a calculated flaw that the esthetikon couldn't be set to make. Orpheus and the souls were classic or later; the three-headed dog was archaic. That was to tell you about the antiquity and invincibility of Hell, and that Cerberus knows Orpheus will never go back into life with his bride.

There was the heroic, tragic central figure that looked mighty enough to battle with the gods, but battle wasn't any good against the grinning, knowing, hateful three-headed dog it stood on. You don't battle the pavement where you walk or the floor of the house you're in; you can't. So Orpheus, his face a mask of controlled and suffering fury, crashes a great chord from his lyre that moved trees and stones. Around him the naked souls in Hell start at the chord, each in its own way: the young lovers down in death; the mother down in death; the musician, deaf and down in death, straining to hear.

Halvorsen, walking uncertainly toward the fountain, felt something break inside him, and a heaviness in his lungs. As he pitched forward among the weeds, he thought he heard the chord from the lyre and didn't care that the three-headed dog was grinning its knowing, hateful grin down at him.

VI

WHEN Halvorsen awoke, he supposed he was in Hell. There were the young lovers, arms about each others' waists, solemnly looking down at him, and the mother was placidly smoothing his brow. He stirred and felt his left arm fall heavily.

"Ah," said the mother, "you mustn't." He felt her pick up his limp arm and lay it across his chest. "Your poor finger!" she sighed. "Can you talk? What happened to it?"

He could talk, weakly. "Labuerre and I," he said. "We were moving a big block of marble with the crane — somehow the

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finger got under it. I didn't notice until it was too late to shift my grip without the marble slipping and smashing on the floor."

The boy said in a solemn, adolescent croak: "You mean you saved the marble and lost your finger?"

"Marble," he muttered. "It's so hard to get. Labuerre was so old."

The young lovers exchanged a glance and he slept again. He was half awake when the musician seized first one of his hands and then the other, jabbing them with stubby fingers and bending his lion's head close to peer at the horny callouses left by chisel and mallet.

"*Ja, ja,*" the musician kept saying.

Hell goes on forever, so for an eternity he jolted and jarred, and for an eternity he heard bickering voices: "Why he was so foolish, then?" "A idiot he could be." "Hush, let him rest." "The children told the story." "There only one Labuerre was." "Easy with the tubing." "Let him rest."

Daylight dazzled his eyes.

"Why you were so foolish?" demanded a harsh voice. "The sister says I can talk to you now, so that is what I first want to know."

He looked at the face of—not the musician; that had been delirium. But it was a tough old face.

"*Ja,* I am mean-looking; that is settled. What did you think you were doing without coveralls and way over your exposure time?"

"I wanted to die," said Halvorsen. There were tubes sticking in his arms.

The crag-faced old man let out a contemptuous bellow.

"Sister!" he shouted. "Pull the plasma tubes out before more we waste. He says he wants to die."

"Hush," said the nurse. She laid her hand on his brow again.

"Don't bother with him, Sister," the old man jeered. "He is a shrinking little flower, too delicate for the great, rough world. He has done nothing, he can do nothing, so he decides to make of himself a nuisance by dying."

"You lie," said Halvorsen. "I worked. Good God, how I worked! Nobody wanted my work. They wanted me, to wear in their buttonholes like a flower. They were getting to me. Another year and I wouldn't have been an artist any more."

"*Ja?*" asked the old man. "Tell me about it."

Halvorsen told him, sometimes weeping with self-pity and weakness, sometimes cursing the old man for not letting him die, sometimes quietly describing this statuette or that portrait head, or raving wildly against the mad folly of the world.

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At the last he told the old man about Lucy.

"You cannot have everything, you know," said his listener.

"I can have her," answered the artist harshly. "You wouldn't let me die, so I won't die. I'll go back and I'll take her away from that fat-head Malone that she ought to marry. I'll give her a couple of happy years working herself to skin and bones for me before she begins to hate it—before I begin to hate it."

"You can't go back," said the old man. "I'm Cerberus. You understand that? The girl is nothing. The society you come from is nothing. We have a place here . . . Sister, can he sit up?"

The woman smiled and cranked his bed. Halvorsen saw through a picture window that he was in a mountain-rimmed valley that was very green and dotted with herds and unpainted houses.

"Such a place there had to be," said the old man. "In the whole geography of Europe, there had to be a Soltau Valley with winds and terrain just right to deflect the dust."

"Nobody knows?" whispered the artist.

"We prefer it that way. It's impossible to get some things, but you would be surprised how little difference it makes to the young people. They are great travelers, the young people, in their sweaty coveralls with radiation meters. They think when they see the ruined cities that the people who lived in them must have been mad. It was a little travel party like that which found you. The boy was impressed by something you said, and I saw some interesting things in your hands. There isn't much rock around here; we have fine deep topsoil. But the boys could get you stone.

"There should be a statue of the Mayor for one thing, before I die. And from the Rathaus the wooden angels have mostly broken off. Soltau Valley used to be proud of them—could you make good copies? And of course cameras are useless and the best drawings we can do look funny. Could you teach the youngers at least to draw so faces look like faces and not behinds? And like you were saying about you and Labuerre, maybe one younger there will be so crazy that he will want to learn it all, so Soltau will always have an artist and sculptor for the necessary work. And you will find a Lucy or somebody better. I think better."

"Hush," warned the nurse. "You're exciting the patient."

"It's all right," said Halvorsen eagerly. "Thanks, but it's really all right."

—C. M. KORNBLUTH

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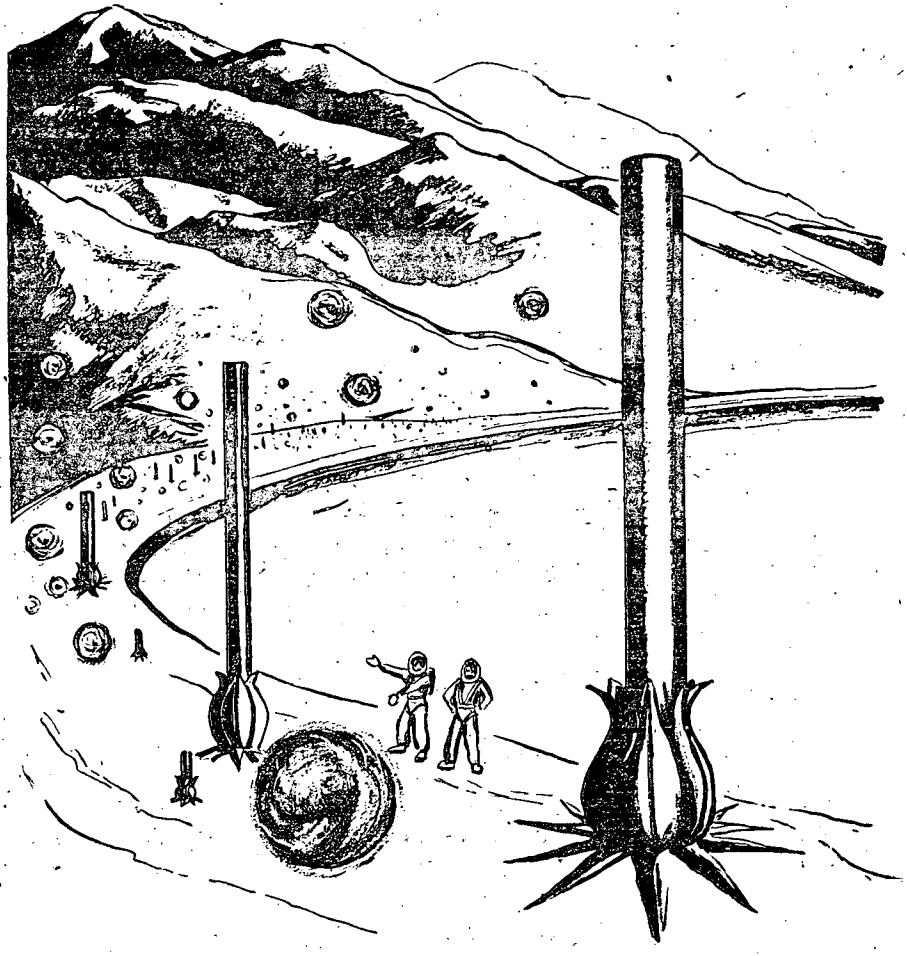
WINNER



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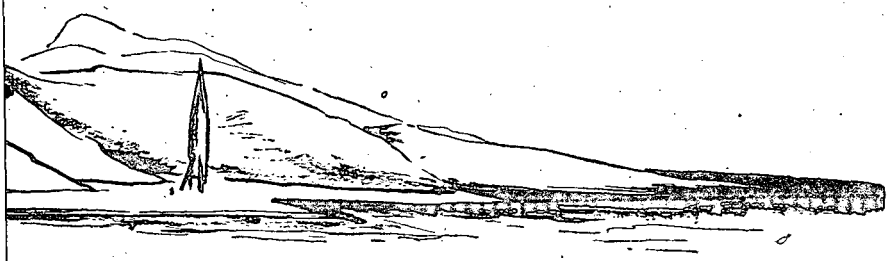
LOSE ALL

By JACK VANCE

As a planet, it was not much, but two forms of life happened to want it at the same time. The result was a fight neither side knew occurred!



CHIEF Officer Avery came up the tube into the bridge sucking a bulb of coffee. Second Mate Dart rose stiffly from the seat where he had spent his watch. "She's all yours."

Avery was thin, hawk-nosed. His complexion was sallow leather color, his hair lank and sparse. He had black eyes between narrow lids and the angle at which they crossed his cheeks gave his face a look of clownish melancholy. Dart was stocky, stub-featured. His hair was Airedale-red; he was abrupt and positive in his movements. Stretching with a quick wide sweep of short arms, he joined Avery by the forward cupola.

Avery leaned forward, looked up, down, right, left, tracing the veins of rose and electric blue across the black of macroid space.

Illustrations by THORNE

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He said over his shoulder, "She's dim. Turn her up. Can't see twenty feet at this level."

Dart, blinking, half-asleep, adjusted a rheostat, increasing the flood of polarized light from the bow projectors, and the gristle-like lines of force out in macroid space shone with greater brilliance and detail.

Avery grunted, "That's a lot different. And there's a focus coming up, where those two stringers dent in toward each other."

Dart came to watch as the lines trembled, bulged toward each other. Films of color began to flow from the area: wan yellow, pink, green. Suddenly a hot spark of red appeared.

"There's the focus," said Avery sourly. "Three feet from your nose, the center of a sun."

Dart ruefully rubbed his chin, thankful that Avery rather than Captain Badt had caught him dozing.

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Small to medium, from the kink to that inner blue line," said Avery. "Well, let's check for planets; that's what we're out here for."

Inch by inch they searched the cupola, up, down, right, left. Dart said, "By golly, here it is. Just like the illustration in the text. Maybe we'll slice that bonus yet."

The hot red spark faded to yellow; the twist of colored veins which signified a planet started to uncoil. Avery sprang back, snapped the drift switch, and the lines became static.

For a moment he studied the pattern in the hemispherical cupola. "The sun's right about here." He indicated a point between himself and Dart. "The planet's just inside the cupola."

"We're big men," said Dart.

Avery twisted his mouth in a saturnine grimace. "Either big, or a long way off in a freak direction."

"With all these guys running loose claiming to be geniuses," said Dart, "it's funny one of them hasn't figured it out."

Avery had been searching the cupola for further kinks. "Figure what out?"

"What happens when we go into macroid space."

"You're a dreamer," said Avery. "The universe shrinks, or we and the ship get cosmically big. The main thing is, we get there. Talk to Bascomb, he'll give you ten answers, all different. That's genius for you." Bascomb was the ship's biologist, who had gained himself the reputation of a tireless polemist and theoretician.

Avery took one more look at the kink. "Call the captain, ring general quarters. We're going into normal space."

* * *

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THE unigen was an intelligent organism, though its characteristics included neither form nor structure. Its components were mobile nodes of a luminous substance which was neither matter nor yet energy. There were millions of nodes and each was connected with every other node by tendrils similar to the lines of force in macroid space.

The unigen might be compared to a great brain, the nodes corresponding to the gray cells, the lines of force to the nerve tissue. It might appear as a bright sphere, or it might disperse its nodes at light speed to all corners of the universe.

Like every other aspect of reality, the unigen was a victim of entropy; to survive, it processed energy down the scale of availability, acquiring the energy from radioactive matter. The unigen's business of living included a constant search for energy.

There were periods of plenitude when the unigen would wax heavy with energy and might expand the number of its nodes by a kind of parthenogenetic fission. Other times the nodes would wane, glowing only feebly, and the unigen would seek energy stuff like a wolf, stalking the planets, satellites, meteors and dark stars for crumbs of even low-grade energy material. During a lean time, one of the nodes, approaching the planet of a small sun, became aware of quanta suggesting the presence of radioactivity: a spangle of distinctive color against a mottled background.

Hope, an emotion compounded of desire and imagination, was not alien to the unigen. It speeded the node forward and the radiation came hard and sharp. The node flitted down through a high scud of cloud. The glow of colored light stretched, elongated, and near its middle shone a markedly bright spot, like a diamond on a band of silver, evidently where the radioactive material broke surface. Toward this spot the unigen directed the node.

As it dropped, the unigen sought evidences of danger: the spoor of energy-eaters, sources of static electricity, such as clouds, which might disrupt the tight coils of a node with a spark.

The air was clear and the planet seemed free of dangerous life-forms. The node fell like a bright snowflake toward the central concentration of radioactivity.

* * *

THE ship circled the planet in a reconnaissance orbit. Captain Badt, taciturn and something of a martinet, stood by the bridge telescreen, receiving reports from the technicians and keeping his opinions to himself.

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Dart muttered to Avery in a disgruntled voice, "I'd hardly call the place a tourist planet."

"Looks pretty grim in spots, but it looks like a bonus."

Dart sighed, shook his round red head. "There never yet was a world so tough that colonists wouldn't flock out to it. If it's not cold enough to freeze air and not hot enough to boil water, and if you can breathe without popping your eyes, then it's land, and men seem to want it."

"I was born on a planet a hell of a lot worse than this," said Avery shortly.

Dart was silent a moment; then, with the air of a man who refuses to admit discouragement, went on. "Well, it's livable. Breathable atmosphere, temperature and gravity inside the critical area, and—so far—no signs of life." He went to the cupola, which now overlooked the world below. "At home the ocean's blue. It's yellow on Alexander, red on Coralasan. Here it's green. Grass by-Jesus green."

"Different proposition altogether," said Avery. "The red and yellow come from plankton. This green is algae or moss or seaweed. No telling how thick it is. Might be a man could walk out on it and pasture his cows."

"Lots of good grazing," admitted Dart. "About four million square miles in sight from here. Probably the source of the planet's oxygen. According to Bascomb, there's no surface vegetation. Maybe lichens, a few shrubs and such. . . . That sea-bed must be thick with humus. . . ."

The speaker from the laboratory click-clicked. On the other wing of the bridge Captain Badt snapped, "Report!"

The code-sono opened the circuit; the voice of Jason the geologist said, "Here's a full report on the atmosphere. Thirty-one per cent oxygen, eleven per cent helium, forty per cent nitrogen, ten per cent argon, four per cent CO_2, the other four per cent inert. Substantially an Earth-type atmosphere."

"Thank you," said Captain Badt formally. "Off."

He paced up and down the bridge frowning, his hands clasped behind his back.

"The old man's in a hurry," Avery said quietly to Dart. "I can read his mind. He doesn't like survey duty, and he's figuring that if he finds a good Class A planet, he can use it as an excuse to take off for Earth."

Captain Badt marched stiffly back and forth, paused, went to the speaker. "Jason."

"Yes, sir?"

"What's the story on the geology so far?"

"I can't tell much from this high, but the relief seems gener-

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ally a product of igneous action rather than erosion. Naturally, that's a guess."

"A good ore planet, possibly?"

"At a guess, yes. There's plenty of folding, lots of faults, not too much sediment. Where those mountains break up through the coastal strip, I'd expect schists, gneiss, broken rocks cemented with quartz and calcite."

"Thank you." Captain Badt went to the magniscreen, watched the landscape drift past. He turned to Avery. "I think we'll dispense with further investigation and set down."

The speaker click-clicked. "Report!" said Captain Badt.

It was Jason again. "I've located an extensive outcrop of radioactive ore, probably pitchblende or possibly carnotite. It shines like a searchlight when I drop the X-screen across the scope. It runs along the shore just south of the long inlet."

"Thank you." To Avery: "We'll set down there."

THE reconnaissance party, consisting of Avery and Jason, walked along the black gravel pebbles of the shore. To their left, the ocean spread out to the horizon, a green velvety flat like a tremendous billiard table. To the right, black-shadowed gulleys led back into the mountains—crag-crested barrens of rock. The sun was smaller and yellower than Sol; the light was wan, like Earth sunlight through a pall of smoke. Although the air had been certified breathable, the men wore head-domes, precautions against possibly dangerous bacteria or spores.

Through a pick-up TV eye mounted above Avery's dome, Captain Badt watched from the ship. "Any insects, animal life of any sort?" he asked.

"Haven't noticed any so far . . . That upholstered ocean should make a good home for bugs. Jason threw a stone out and it's still sitting high and dry. I believe a man could walk out there with a pair of snowshoes."

"What is that vegetation to your right?"

Avery paused, inspected the shrub. "Nothing very different from those around the ship. Just one of those paint-brush plants a little larger than the others. Country seems rather arid, in spite of this ocean. Takes rain to make good soil. Right, Jason?"

"Right."

Captain Badt said, "After a while, we'll check into the ocean. Right now I'm interested in that uranium reef. You should be almost on top of it."

"I think it's about a hundred yards ahead, a ledge of black rock. Yep, Jason's detector is buzzing like mad . . . Jason says

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it's pitchblende—uranium oxide." He stopped short in his tracks.

"What's the trouble?"

"There's a swarm of lights over it. Flickering up and down like mosquitoes."

Captain Badt focused the image on the screen. "Yes, I see them."

"Might be some sort of fireflies," hazarded Jason.

Avery took a few cautious steps forward, halted. One of the luminous spots darted up, sped toward him, swung around his head, circled Jason, returned to the uranium ledge.

Avery said uncertainly, "I guess they're not dangerous. Some kind of bug, apparently."

Captain Badt said, "Peculiar how they're concentrated along that ledge. As if they're feeding on the uranium, or like the feel of the radiation."

"There's nothing else nearby. No vegetation of any sort, so it must be the uranium."

"I'll send Bascomb out," said Captain Badt. "He can investigate more closely."

* * *

THE node which originally discovered the planet settled on an outcrop of the uranium oxide and was presently joined by other nodes, fleeting in from less rewarding areas. The absorption of energy began; pressing against the massive blue-black rock, a node would generate sufficient heat to vaporize a quantity of the ore. Enveloping the gas, the node worked a complicated alchemy which released the latent energy. The node absorbed this energy, compacting and augmenting its structure, kinking its whorls of force into harder knots. At the same time it discharged a flood of energy into the lines to the rest of the unigen, and everywhere in the universe nodes shone with a new golden-green luster.

Insofar as surprise may be equated to witnessing events which have previously been dismissed as improbable, the unigen felt surprise when it sensed the approach of two creatures along the shore.

The unigen had observed living creatures on other worlds. Some of these were dangerous, like the mirror-metal energy-eaters swimming in the thick atmosphere of another uranium-rich planet. Others were unimportant as competition for food. These particular slow-moving creatures appeared harmless.

To investigate at close hand, the unigen sent out a node, and received a report of infra-red radiation, fluctuating electromagnetic fields.

"Harmless autochthones," was the unigen's summation. "Creatures living by chemical reaction at a low energy level, like the

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land-worms of Planet 11432. Useless as energy sources, incapable of damage to the hard energy of a node."

Dismissing further consideration of the two creatures, the unigen absorbed itself with the uranium bank . . . Odd. On the surface of the ore had appeared what seemed to be a vegetable growth, a peppering of tiny spines rising from little flat collars. They had not been evident previously.

And here came another of the slow-moving creatures. This one, like the others, emitted infra-red radiation, several different weaker waves.

The creature halted, then slowly approached the ledge.

The unigen watched with mild curiosity. Precise visual definition was beyond its powers, so the land-worm's movements came as blurs of shifting radiation.

It seemed to manipulate a metal object which glinted and reflected sunlight — evidently a bit of pitchblende which had attracted its attention.

The land-worm moved closer. It made a few blurred motions, and suddenly appeared to have extended one of its members. It moved once more, and a mesh of carbonaceous material fell around one of the nodes.

Interesting, thought the unigen. The land-worm evidently had been attracted by the glitter and motion. The action implied curiosity; was the creature more highly evolved than its structure indicated? Or possibly it sustained life by trapping small bright animals, such as phosphorescent jellyfish from the sea.

The land-worm drew the net close. To resolve the problem, the unigen permitted the node to be carried along.

A brittle shell of another carbon compound was cupped over the node and an enclosure effected.

Was this perhaps the land-worm's organ of digestion? There appeared to be no digestive juice, no grinding or crushing action.

The land-worm moved slightly away from the ledge and performed a series of mysterious gyrations. The unigen was puzzled.

Two metal needles entered the brittle cage. In sudden consternation the unigen sought to snap the node free.

* * *

AVERY and Jason continued along the pitchblende ledge. Presently it dipped from sight, and the shore of black-gray pebbles slanted up from the green velvet ocean to the heavy shoulder of the mountain.

"Nothing out here, Captain," said Avery. "Just looks like more shore and more mountains for ten or twenty miles."

"Very well, you can return."

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He added in a grumbling voice, "Bascomb's on his way out to check on those flickering lights. He thinks they're emanations, like will o' the wisps."

Avery winked at Jason, and cutting off the band to the ship said, "Bascomb won't be satisfied till he has one of 'em pinned to a board like a butterfly."

Jason held up a hand, signed Avery to listen. Avery switched back on the communication band, heard Bascomb's precise voice.

"—from a distance of thirty feet, the spectroscope shows a uniform band, radiating at apparently equal intensity in all frequencies. This is curious. Normal phosphors emit in discrete bands. Perhaps some such occurrence like St. Elmo's Fire is involved, though I confess I don't quite understand—"

Captain Badt growled impatiently, "Are they alive or aren't they?"

Bascomb's voice was petulant. "I've no idea, I'm sure. After all, this is a strange planet. The word 'life' has a thousand interpretations. Incidentally, I note a very odd type of vegetation growing on the pitchblende itself."

"Avery mentioned no vegetation," said Captain Badt. "I questioned him specifically."

Bascomb sniffed. "He could hardly have missed it. It's a line of shoots about six inches tall. They're like spikes, apparently stiff and crisp, rising from suckers clamped to the surface. Very similar to something I saw once on Martius Juvenal where a pitchblende vein breaks surface . . . It's very peculiar. The roots seem to have drilled into the solid rock."

"You're the biologist," said Captain Badt. "You ought to know."

Bascomb's voice took on a note of cheery assurance. "Well, we'll see. I've read of emanations being observed near pitchblende disposits, but I have never observed them. Possibly the concentrated radioactivity might be acting on minute condensations of moisture . . ."

Captain Badt cleared his throat. "Very well, handle it your own way. Be careful and don't stir them up; they might be dangerous in some way."

Bascomb said, "I've brought along a net and specimen bottle. I planned to capture one of the motes and examine it under the miscroscope."

"I suppose you know what you're doing," said Captain Badt in a tired voice.

"I've devoted my life to the study of extraterrestrial life," replied Bascomb stiffly. "I rather imagine that these motes are analogous to the sparkle-ticks of Procyon B . . . Now, if I just ad-

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just my net. There! I've got one. Into the specimen jar. My, how it shines! Can you see it, Captain?"

"Yes, I can see it. What's it like under the microscope?"

"Hm . . ." Bascomb brought his pocket magnifier to bear. "There's no resolution. I see a central concentration of fire; undoubtedly that's where the insect is. I think I'll pass an electric spark through the creature and kill it, and perhaps I can examine it under higher power."

"Don't stir 'em up—" began Captain Badt. The screen flared white in his face, went dark. "Bascomb! Bascomb!"

Captain Badt received no reply.

* * *

DESTRUCTION of a node sent a restless shiver through the unigen. A node represented an integral fraction of the unigen's brain; it had been conditioned to modify a definite class of thoughts. When the node was destroyed, the thinking in the class was curtailed until another node could be produced and endowed with the same precise channels.

The implications of the event were further cause for anxiety. The metal energy-eaters on another planet used the same technique — a stream of electrons smashing across the center of the node, to upset the equilibrium. The result was a flash of released energy, which the metal ovoids were able to absorb. Apparently the land-worm had been surprised by the explosion and destroyed — possibly mistaking the node for some less energetic type of creature.

It might be wise, thought the unigen, to destroy the land-worms as soon as they appeared, and thus prevent further accidents.

Still another vexation: the spike-vegetation was spreading its collars across the surface of the ledge, sinking deep roots into the energy-stuff. Apparently it built the displaced material into the spike. When the unigen sent a node to absorb the leached uranium, it found a hard shell of inert substance, proof against the node's kernel of heat.

Nodes flickered and quivered all over the universe as the unigen marshaled its computative abilities. Rigorous steps would have to be taken.

* * *

FAR down the beach, Avery and Jason saw the white flash of the explosion, saw the black gullies light up in a ghastly swift glare. Then came a rolling sound and a jar of concussion.

Avery cut anxiously into the communication band. "Captain Badt, Avery calling. What's happened?"

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Captain Badt said harshly, "That fool Bascomb's just blown himself up."

"We're up the beach about a mile, I think, from where the explosion came," said Avery hurriedly. "Should we—"

Captain Badt interrupted. "Don't do anything. Don't touch anything. This is a strange planet, and it's dangerous. Bascomb's just proved that."

"What did he do?"

"He apparently ran an electric current through one of those bright spots of light, and it went off in his face."

Avery stopped short, looked warily up the shore. "We went past pretty closely and they didn't bother us. It must be the electricity."

"You be careful on your way back. I can't afford to lose any more men. Keep out of the way of those lights."

"Yes, sir," said Avery. He motioned to Jason. "Let's go. We'd better skirt the water as close as possible."

Crowding the soggy verge of the ocean, they rounded the bend in the shoreline, approached the scene of the explosion.

"Doesn't seem to be much left of Bascomb," said Jason in a hushed voice.

"Not much crater either," said Avery. "It's a funny deal."

"Look, now there's thousands of those light-bugs. Like bees around a hive. And look at that stuff growing out of the ledge! That wasn't there when we went past! Talk about mushrooms . . ."

Avery turned his binoculars along the ledge. "Probably it's got something to do with the light-flecks. The lights could be spores or pollen or something of the sort."

"Anything's possible," said Jason. "I've seen vines thirty miles long, as thick around as a house, and if you jab them with a stick they quiver their whole length. They're on Antaeus. The kids in the Earth colony tap out Morse code back and forth to each other. The vine doesn't like it, but there's nothing it can do."

Avery had been watching the dancing lights over his shoulder. "They're like eyes watching us . . . Before a colony's sent out here, these damn things will have to be destroyed. They'd be dangerous flying loose around electricity."

Jason said, "Duck! Here comes a couple of them after us!"

Avery said in a nervous voice, "Don't get excited, kid. They're just drifting on the breeze."

"Drifting, hell," said Jason, and started to run for the ship.

* * *

THE unigen observed the landworms returning along the shore, evidently seeking the sea-

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matter on which they fed. To guard against the accidental destruction of any more nodes, it would be wise to destroy the creatures as they appeared, and clean them from this particular section of the planet.

It dispatched two nodes toward the land-worms. They seemed to sense danger and broke into lumbering motion. The unigen accelerated the nodes; they darted forward at half-light speed, punctured the land-worms, reversed, shuttled back and forth a score of times, each time leaving a small steaming hole. The land-worms collapsed to the black pebbles, lay limp.

The unigen brought the nodes back to the uranium bank. Now to a more serious matter: the vegetation which was choking off the face of the uranium with its collars and roots.

The unigen concentrated the heat of twenty nodes on one of the spikes. A hole appeared, weakening the entire shoot. It sagged and shriveled, collapsed.

Pleasure was a quality which the structure of the unigen was incapable of expressing, the nearest approach being a calm coasting sense, an awareness of control and mastery of movement. In this state the unigen began a systematic attack on the spikes.

A second member fell over, became pale brown and a third . . .

Overhead appeared a flying object, similar to a land-worm except that it radiated more strongly in the infra-red.

Were the creatures everywhere?

* * *

SECOND Officer Dart had made the original suggestion, diffidently at first, half-expecting Captain Badt to freeze him with a stare the color of zinc. But Captain Badt stood like a statue looking into the blank magni-screen, still tuned to Avery's band.

Dart said with somewhat more boldness, "So far we have no conclusive report to make. Is the planet habitable or not? If we leave now we haven't proved anything."

Captain Badt answered in a voice without resonance, "I can't risk any more men."

Dart rubbed at his bristling red hair. It occurred to him that Captain Badt was getting old.

"Those little lights are vicious," Dart said emphatically. "We know that. They've killed three of our men. But we can handle them. An electric current blows 'em apart. Another thing, they're like bees around a hive; they mind their own business unless they're bothered. Bascomb, Avery, Jason—they got it because they approached that pitchblende ledge too closely. Here's my idea, and I'll take the risk of carrying

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it through. We knock together a light frame, string it with wire, and charge the strands alternately positive and negative. Then I'll go up in the service 'copter and drift it across the ledge. They're so thick now that we can't help but knock out two-three hundred at a swipe."

Captain Badt clenched and unclenched his hands. "Very well. Go ahead." He turned his back, stared into the blank magniscreen. This would be his last voyage.

With the help of Henry, the ship's electrician, Dart built the frame, strung it with wire, equipped it with a high-potential battery. Strapping himself into the 'copter harness, he rose straight up, dangling a mile of light cable. He became a speck on the gray-blue sky.

"That's it," said Henry into the communication mike. "Now I'll make fast this fly trap affair, and then—I've got another idea. We want the thing to move flat-side forward, so I'll tie on a bridle with a bit of drag at the end."

He arranged the drag, snapped the switch on the battery. "She's ready to go."

A mile above, Dart moved across the sky toward the ledge of pitchblende.

Captain Badt maintained an iron grip on the hand rail in the bridge, watching Dart's progress on the magniscreen.

"Up, Dart," he said. "Up four feet . . . There . . . Steady. That's about right. Take it slow . . ."

* * *

THE unigen's range of perception included the lowest radio waves as well as the hottest ultra-cosmics, a spectrum of a million colors. Stereoscopic vision was implicit in the fact that each node served as an organ of sight. Resolution of images was achieved by accepting only radiation normal to the surface of the node. In this manner a coarse spherical picture was received by each node, although detail as fine as the frame strung with wire was nearly invisible.

The unigen's first warning was a pressure from the approaching electrostatic fields; then the frame swept across the ledge, full through the heaviest concentration of nodes.

The blast seared the ground, melted it into a flaming molten basin for a radius of fifty feet. The nodes which escaped the screen were flung pell-mell by the explosion out across the ocean.

Directly under the explosion, the spike-vegetation was scorched; elsewhere, little affected.

The structure of the unigen was no more capable of anger than pleasure; however, its will to survive was intense. Overhead flew

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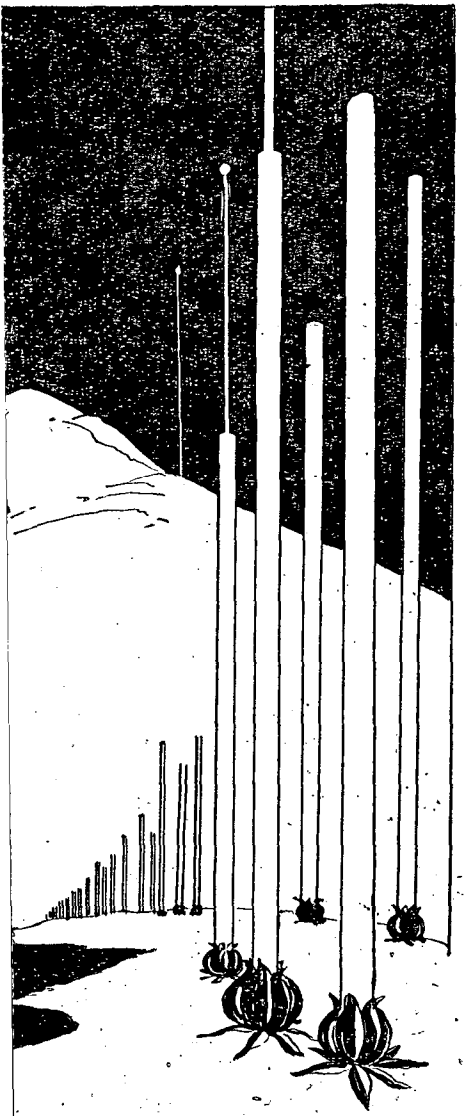

the land-worm. One like it had destroyed a node through electricity; perhaps this one was somehow associated with the last catastrophic explosion. Four nodes slanted up at light speed, snapped back and forth through the land-worm like sewing-machine needles hemming a sheet. The creature fell to the ground.

The unigen assembled its nodes a hundred feet over the bank of uranium. Ninety-six nodes destroyed.

The unigen weighed the situation. The planet was rich with uranium, but it was also the home of lethal land-worms.

The unigen decided. There was uranium elsewhere in the universe, on thousands of worlds that were silent and dark and free of any kind of life. A lesson had been learned: avoid worlds inhabited by life-forms, no matter how primitive.

The nodes flashed off into the sky, dispersed into space.

* * *

CAPTAIN Badt relaxed his grip on the table. "That's it," he said in a flat voice. "Any world where we lose four good men in four hours—any world inhabited by swarms of crazy atomic bees—that's no world for human beings. Four good men . . ."

He stood silent a moment, limp and dejected.

The cadet wandered into the

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bridge, stared wide-eyed. Lifelong habit reasserted itself. Captain Badt filled out, became erect, rigid. His tunic and trousers hung crisp, his eyes once more shone with authority.

"Ensign, you will act as chief officer until further notice. We're leaving the planet, returning to Earth. Please attend to all exterior ports."

"Yes, sir," said the new Chief Mate.

* * *

THE planet was quiet. The ocean spread bright and green, the mountains rolled back into the badlands: crags, ravines, plateaus—black rock, gray rock, pockets of drifted ash.

On the pitchblende ledge the vegetation waxed tall, five, ten, twenty feet, gray spines mottled with white, ivory, silver. In each a central vein opened; the spike became a tube, straight and stiff as a cannon barrel.

At the bottom of the tube, the fruit of the plant began to develop. There was a spore-case, enclosed by a jacket into which water percolated. Below the spore-case opened another compartment, globe-shaped, communicating with the base of the spike by four splayed channels.

A nub of uranium 235 accumulated in this chamber—one ounce, two ounces, three ounces, more and more, diffused through the membranes of the plant by some evolutionary freak of a metabolism.

The fruit was ripe. One by one, the spikes reached a culmination. A tension within the water-jacket increased past the breaking strain. The jacket split, flooded the compartment below the spore-case, surrounded the knob of uranium.

Explosion. Steam bursting through the stern-pointing channels, back into the tube. Thrust, straight up. Sharp whipping blasts as the cases left the spikes. Up, up, up, at furious acceleration, into space . . .

The water dissipated, the last puff of steam left the tubes. The spore-cases floated free on momentum. The gravitational field of the planet faded to a wisp, a film. The spore-cases drifted on. Now they cooled, cracked wide. From each a thousand capsules spilled into space, and the tiny jerk of the splitting case sent them in courses slightly divergent, enough to scatter them off toward different stars.

Endless seeping of life across space.

Smite into planet, the sift of spores, the search for the hot element, the growth, the culmination, the blast, the impulse.

Then space, years of drift. Out beyond, and past beyond . . .

—JACK VANCE

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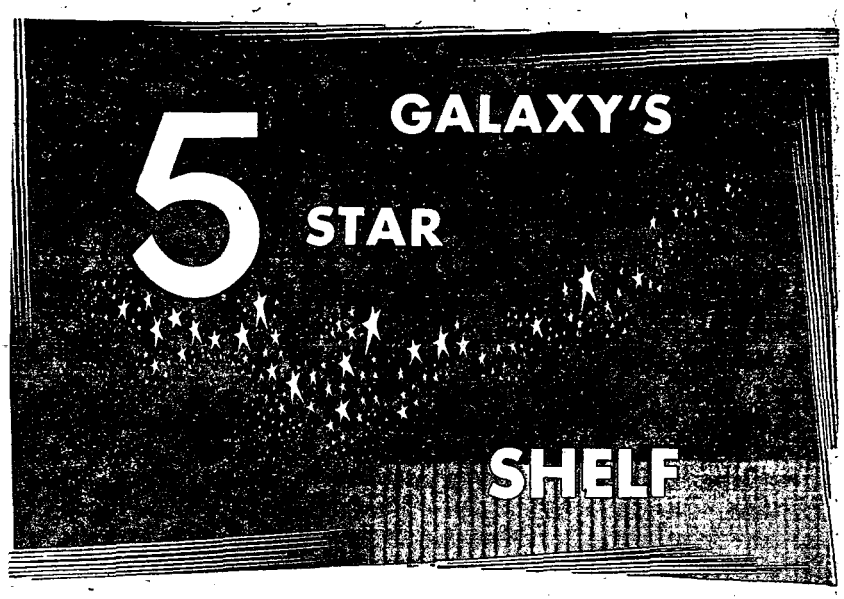

IT is with genuine pleasure—and a sigh of relief—that I introduce herewith the guest reviewer of the month, Robert A. Heinlein, who has written a really flavorful review.

SPACE MEDICINE: THE HUMAN FACTOR IN FLIGHTS BEYOND THE EARTH, Edited by John P. Mabarger, Research Director, Aeromedical Laboratory, University of Illinois. University of Illinois Press, 1951. 83 *pages.* $2.00 *paper,* $3.00 *cloth*

IN one way it was even more thrilling to open this book than it was to read the first edition of Willy Ley's epoch-making *Rockets.* After all, Willy is One Of Our Own Boys, with a lifetime of devotion to space flight and rocket research already half spent. He believed in space flight, and so did we, while the idea was still considered ludicrous by all but an infinitestimal minority, mainly, of course, science fiction fans.

Now enter the Respectable Citizens—government scientists and medical men, Air Forces mostly, soberly engaged in a practical project, to wit, making necessary medical preparation for a new field of activity — space — in exactly the same fashion in which Medical Corps personnel prepare

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for arctic or jungle warfare. The lead article in this symposium was written by the Air Forces Surgeon General himself.

The section headings in the book are: Space Medicine in the United States Air Force; Multiple-Stage Rockets and Artificial Satellites; Physiological Considerations of the Possibility of Life under Extraterrestrial Conditions; Astrophysics of Space Medicine; Orientation in Space; and Bio-Climatology of Manned Rocket Flight.

The book is remarkably easy to read, and the special terms are all explained. Many of the data are new; much information was not formerly easily accessible. Convenient graphic displays present information on "living" conditions on the several planets, for example, and on how to control the temperature inside a spaceship. Elsewhere there is a description of how Martian plants may, and probably do, create their own environments. And there is a discussion of how congenital deaf mutes may make an almost indispensable contribution to the art of space flight, a contribution physically impossible for their unafflicted brethren.

Readers of this magazine will probably want to buy the book; writers for this magazine had darn well better.

—ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

With which I reluctantly take up the reins again and make some comments upon—

FAR BOUNDARIES, edited by August Derleth. Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York, 1951. 292 pages, $2.95

EIGHT readable and twelve practically illegible: this is the record for August Derleth's ninth fantasy and science fiction collection. It includes four "classics" and a bunch of contemporaries divided into two sections—"Mid-Period Pieces" and "The Contemporary Scene." I shall not attempt to describe the significance of the latter two, since I haven't any clear idea of what it may be.

The eight good stories are:

"Missing One's Coach," Anon., Dublin Literary Magazine, 1838. Antiquarian, but surprisingly lively and full of minor surprises.

"Frankenstein—Unlimited," by H. A. Highstone, *Astounding*, 1938.

"Open Sesame," by Stephen Grendon, *Arkham Sampler*, 1949.

"De Profundis," by Murray Leinster, *Thrilling Wonder*, 1945.

"Dear Pen Pal," by A. E. van Vogt, *Arkham Sampler*, 1949.

"Time to Rest," by John Beynon Harris, *Arkham Sampler* (and the British *New Worlds*) 1949.

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"Vignettes of Tomorrow," by Ray Bradbury, *Arkham Sampler,* 1949.

"Later Than You Think," by Fritz Leiber, *Galaxy,* 1950.

The other twelve—well, some may like them better than this reviewer. Personal tastes vary widely, which partly explains the great number of anthologies coming out now. Bear in mind, then, that the above are strictly my own preferences and I am notoriously human and thus subject to error.

WINE OF THE DREAMERS, by John D. MacDonald. Greenberg: Publisher, New York, 1951. 219 *pages,* $2.75

A GOOD example of the "we're property" type of science fiction which assumes that an extraterrestrial, extrahuman race is able to make us do more or less what it wants.

In this well-written novel, many of the accidents, crimes of violence, and unexplained tragedies of the world, and in particular the failure of every attempt at launching a spaceship, are due to the machinations of a group of individuals numbering fewer than a thousand, called the Watchers.

These Watchers, who inhabit a planet several star systems away, are able to enter the bodies of Earthians at will and make these bodies do anything they choose to. This is accomplished by super-hypnotism machines. The irony of the situation revolves around the fact that the Watchers are sublimely convinced that we are mere dreams created for their pleasure, and have no actual reality.

The story is woven around the final discovery by the Watchers that we are "real," and by us that most of our Earthly miseries are caused by these utterly remote aliens, who turn out to be descendants from our own ancestors of at least tens of thousands of years ago.

That the plot and the concepts are not simon-pure originals, both being reminiscent of Eric Frank Russell's famous "we're property" novels, is unimportant. The skill and the imagination with which the tale is developed are genuinely satisfying.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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Slan first appeared, in magazine form, in the fall of 1940. It was issued in book form, five years later, in a limited edition that was quickly sold out. Lately it has not been uncommon for readers to offer $10 or $15 for a copy; and there is at least one authenticated instance of a copy changing hands for $37.

Finally, Simon and Schuster's own science fiction fans decided that something should be done about this. We persuaded van Vogt to lend us his only copy — which we promised to return unscarred.

We found that *Slan* was even more exciting and provocative than we'd remembered. We insisted that it be made available again to the $2.50 (rather than just the $37) audience. Van Vogt thought that was a fine idea, too. And, being a perfectionist, he worked over the book again, revising, adapting, tightening, and polishing. The basic story is unchanged; it is just a bit more of a masterpiece, that's all.

This brand new edition of *Slan* has just been published. With its past history in mind, we thought we ought to give you fair warning so that you can make sure of a copy before it vanishes again. You can find it at your bookseller's now. Or, if you prefer, send the coupon below, direct to the publishers.

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not a creature was stirring

This could be a Christmas story. If it is, it shows one way peace on Earth can be attained!

By DEAN EVANS

HE was a tall, hard man with skin the color of very old iodine. When he climbed up out of the vertical shaft of his small gold mine, *The Lousy Disappointment*, he could have been taken for an Indian, he was that dark. Except, of course, that Indians didn't exist any more in 1982. His name was Tom Gannett and he was about forty years old and he didn't realize his own uniqueness.

When he made it to his feet, the first thing he did was to squint up at the sun. The second was to sneeze, and the third to blow his nose.

"Hey, you old sun!" he growled. "You old crummy sun, you look sicker'n a dog."

Which was literally true, for the sun seemed to be pretty queer. The whole sky seemed to be pretty queer, for that matter. Skies should be blue and the sun should be a bloated golden bauble drifting serenely across them. But the skies were not blue; they were a dirty purplish-gray. And the

Illustrated by DAVID STONE

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sun wasn't a bloated golden bauble; somebody had it by the scruff of the neck and was dragging it.

Gannett planted his big feet wide apart and frowned sourly around and sniffed the air like a dog at a gopher hole. "The damn world smells sick," he grunted.

Which was also true. The world did smell sick. The world smelled something like that peculiar odor that comes from an old graveyard carefully tended by an old man with dank moss sticking to the soles of his old shoes. That kind of smell.

Gannett didn't know why the sun looked sick, and he didn't know why the world smelled sick. Indeed, there were many things Gannett didn't know, among which would be these in particular:

(a) He did not know (since, for the last six months, he had been living and working all alone at his little mine, which was in the remotest of the most remote desert regions of Nevada) that a little less than three weeks earlier, mankind had finally achieved the inevitable: man's own annihilation.

(b) He did not know that he was going to be the loneliest man on Earth—he who was used to, and perfectly content with, the hermitlike existence of a desert rat.

(c) He furthermore did not know that there were four of the Ten Commandments which he wasn't going to be able to break any more—not even if he stayed up nights trying and lived for centuries.

GANNETT snorted the smell from his nostrils and shrugged. Hell with it. He thought about Reno and how he hadn't been there for nearly a year. He thought of the dimly lighted, soft-carpeted cocktail lounges in Reno where drinks come in long stemmed glasses and blondes in long-stemmed legs. Reno at Christmastime, he thought. There was a town, Reno!

He grinned, showing big gold teeth that blazed out of his mouth like the glittering grille on a Buick. He dug his feet into the hard ground and walked the hundred feet or so to his cabin where he sometimes slept when he didn't happen to sleep in the mine. He stripped off his grime-sodden clothes. He stepped out of them, in fact, and stretched luxuriously as though he hadn't felt the good joy of being unclothed for a long time.

He got up and went to a corner of the cabin, rummaged out a pair of dusty clogs and pushed his feet into them. Then—and they don't come any nakeder than he was—he went outside and around the shack to the rear where he kept his jeep and where the shower was.

He stepped into it, for it was nothing more ornate than a large oil drum suspended on long four by sixes. He yanked on a rope that hung down from the drum.

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The result of doing that made him leap out again dripping wet and colder than a buried mother-in-law.

He shivered, eyes blinking fast. He took a deep breath. His gold teeth went together tightly and the big muscles in his neck corded defensively. He deliberately went under the shower again. Pawing a sliver of laundry soap from a ledge on one of the four by sixes, he went to work with it, and when he finally tripped the hanging rope once more, he was a clean man.

He went into the cabin. It wasn't any warmer than the great outdoors, but that was where his clothes were. He shaved from an old granite basin full of cold water. After that he went to a hook on the wall and got down a suit of clothes which looked as though it had shriveled up waiting for somebody to wear it. The last thing he did before leaving was to pry up one of the boards behind the door and lift out of this hiding place a small leather bag.

The bag was filled with gold.

THE sun was gone now. Leg-like rays of light still sprawled, dirty-looking, in the sky over toward the California line, but aside from these extremities, most of it was somewhere out in the Pacific. The purplish sky was darker now. Drab. Dead, somehow.

The old jeep started nicely. It always started nicely; that was one of the good things about a jeep. The only funny thing was that out of its exhaust pipe in the rear came angry purplish flames. Queer flames. Gannett stared at them, surprised.

"Even the damn jeep is sick," he muttered. He was wrong, of course, but he had no way of knowing that. He backed around, finally, and went down what he called his driveway, which was little more than rock-strewn ground, until he came to a small dirt road. This led him to another, larger dirt road, which in turn led him to route #395, which was a U.S. Highway.

A hundred miles farther on, he came to the outskirts of Carson City. It wasn't until he pulled into a gas station that he realized something was wrong. Nobody jumped out to wipe his windshield. The attendant who still leaned in the doorway of the station had a rag in his hand, but he didn't budge. He couldn't. His face looked like weathered leather and he was dead.

"Holy. . . !" whispered Gannett incredulously. He forgot about needing gas. He jumped in the jeep and drove down the main stem and found Police Headquarters in an old gray

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stone building. He knew it was Police Headquarters for the green neon over the revolving door had *CPD* on it and it was still burning.

He went up the steps two at a time, banged through the swinging doors and stamped straight to where the Sergeant sat at a desk over in the corner by the switchboard.

"Hey, by God!" yelled Gannett to the Desk Sergeant. "There's a guy down the street in a gas station and he's standing up in the doorway and he's dead as a mackerel!"

Dramatic words. But the Desk Sergeant was no longer among the living and didn't appreciate them. It took Gannett a long while to get over that. He slowly backed away. He made the big oak doors, still backing. He went down the stairs on legs as stiff as icicles.

He got back in his jeep and started up again. He knew there was something terribly wrong, but before he thought about it, he knew he had to have a drink. He pulled up in front of a saloon that had nice, cheery, glowing lights showing through the big front window. He got out of the jeep. He went through the swinging glass doors and straight to the bar.

"Scotch!"

Nobody answered. The barman behind the mahogany, facing him, didn't make a move. The barman had a dead cigarette between his cold colorless lips. The cigarette had a half inch of ash on it. The ash looked as though it was sculptured out of purple marble.

Gannett put both hands flat on the bar and swallowed hard. He twisted his head and looked over the shoulder of a customer on his left, who was leaning negligently on the bar with one elbow. There was a half-full bottle in front of the leaning man and it had an alert-looking horse's head stuck in the neck of it for a pouring spout.

"Excuse me, Mac," Gannett whispered.

The leaning man didn't twitch a muscle.

Gannett sucked in a deep breath. He reached. He got the bottle. He blinked stupidly at the bottle and then he put it down very carefully and took another breath and looked at a highball glass in front of the leaning man. The highball glass was empty and clean, but the leaning man's fingers were curled lightly and gracefully around it. They were nice fingers. White fingers. Fingers that looked as if they hadn't had to do any hard work lately. Slender, tapering, carefully manicured fingers.

Gannett swore softly. He

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yanked the horse's head out and then poked the bottle into his mouth and tilted it up. He held it until there wasn't anything left but the very glass it was made of plus the bright little paper label. His throat burned. He coughed. He banged the empty bottle down on the bartop and coughed again—hard.

The leaning man stirred, seemed to turn slowly, stiffly, in a half arc that put him face to face with Gannett. Then he went down backward and all in one piece, like a tall tree on top of a hill on a very still night.

He went down with the glass in his hand and, when he hit, swirls of thick dust rose lazily from the floor and then settled back over his rigid form like freshly falling snow blanketing something left out on the front lawn.

THE night was black. There wasn't a star and there wasn't a sound except for Earth sounds, which are never very loud. Gannett sat in his jeep with the motor running and the purple flames coming out of the tailpipe. His hands were tight around the wheel, but the Jeep wasn't moving. Gannett was staring off into space and his eyes looked as though somebody had peeled them back.

He said it to himself mentally, for the first few times. Then, as if he couldn't contain them any longer, the words tumbled out of his mouth into the night air:

"Everybody's dead, by God!"

He drove through deserted streets until he found an all-night drugstore. It didn't seem funny to him just yet that the streets were deserted; that was something he would think of later. He walked into the drugstore and went to the newsstand and picked up a copy of the *Carson Daily Bugle*. The date struck him first. It was the wrong date; it was three weeks ago. He dropped it and picked up another, a Reno paper this time. Same trouble with the date. He read the headline then:

REDS STRIKE AT TURKEY!
Unveil New Weapon

He blinked at it. There was a little more — pitifully little — to the effect that Congress had been asked for a declaration of war in order to defend the assaulted member of the Atlantic Pact nations.

Gannett swallowed hard. He dropped the paper and turned to the clerk who was leaning over the glass counter watching him.

"Jeez!" Gannett said. "When did all this happen? I didn't even know about it."

He didn't get any answer from

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the clerk. He knew he wouldn't from the way the clerk's eyes looked. They looked as if they should have been under refrigeration.

"People around dead," he muttered. "By God, the Governor oughta know about this!"

He left the drugstore and drove straight for the State Capitol Building, which wasn't far away, for Carson City isn't very large. He walked up the long concrete ribbon to the big stone steps. He mounted them. He stood before the bronze doors for an instant, a feeling of awe coming over him despite what he knew he was going to tell the Governor. He pulled on the handle of the nearest of the bronze doors.

Nothing happened.

It was locked, of course. The Capitol is never open at three A.M. (which was the exact time when it had happened three weeks ago—but he didn't know that).

A feeling of rage came over Gannett slowly, like heat radiating through soft wood. He stood on the stone steps and faced the broad expanse of lawn, which, in the summertime, at least, was very lovely. He slowly pulled his leather bag of gold from his coat pocket and raised it up so he could see it. Then he turned once more to the bronze doors and smashed the bag of gold through one of the glass panes.

"Gannett done it!" he roared. "If anybody wants to know, tell them Gannett, by God!"

He went back to his jeep. The big, darkly hulking form of the red brick Post Office Building went by and faded into the night. He passed a jewelry store. He looked in. An electric mantel clock in the store window indicated the time as nine-ten. He passed a supermarket. The big illuminated clock on the facade said nine-seven. The clock in the service station, where he finally pulled in for gas, pointed at nine exactly. Cycles have to be controlled if electric clocks are to keep correct time, but that was something else he did not know.

After he put back the gasoline hose, he left one more observation on the silence of the night before driving to Reno. He said it loudly, and there was angry frustration in every word of it:

"Hell with Carson City. To *hell* with it!"

APPROACHING downtown Reno at night is a pleasant, cheerful experience. There are lights all around, like a store selling electric fixtures. On the right hand side of Virginia Street they glow brightly, each one a little gaudier than the last. Big lights. Neon lights in all the colors neon lights can come in.

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Signs on the fronts of the big gaming houses that stay open until lights aren't needed any more; and the one flash of light across Virginia Street at the intersection of Commercial Row which had been photographed more times than the mind of man could have conjectured:

RENO

The Biggest Little City in the World

He drove slowly by the Happy Times Club. He could see quite a few people inside. You wouldn't think there was anything wrong when you looked at something like that.

At the corner of First Street, he stopped for the signal. He pulled around a military vehicle that seemed to be waiting for the signal, too. It was an open vehicle, painted the olive drab of the Army, and sitting stiffly erect behind the wheel was a natty-looking first lieutenant with his cap at just the right angle over one eye.

The signal bell up on the corner poles clanged loudly and the lights turned green. Gannett crossed the intersection, but the lieutenant and his military vehicle stayed behind.

He went by the Golden Bubble, which was perhaps the largest and gaudiest of all the gaming places in Reno. Its big front, done in glass bricks with multicolored lights behind them, looked like some monstrous kaleidoscope built for the use of the Man in the Moon. Seen from his jeep, through the plate glass of the wide door, the interior of the Golden Bubble seemed to be a happy, carousing place full of the joyous laughter of folks having a fine time. Only that wasn't so, of course, for the only sounds to be heard were the jeep's motor and the signal bells on the corner poles.

Gannett parked. He walked back, went slowly through the doors of the Golden Bubble. The first thing that met his eyes was the flashing welcome grin of the head waiter, who was dressed in a tuxedo just inside the doors. The head waiter had his hand half out, as if to shake the hand of Gannett as he came in. Gannett almost stuck out his own hand in return—but not quite.

He went to the bar. He didn't look at the barman lying on the floor with his ear in the spittoon. He shambled around the end of the bar, took a full bottle of scotch off the backbar shelf, broke the seal and took a long swallow. The bartender didn't notice.

After that he took the bottle with him out on the floor. He went around a man in an overcoat who looked to be uncom-

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fortably warm but wasn't. He went over to a roulette table and stared the croupier straight in the eyes. He reached for a pile of chips under the croupier's right hand and slid them over.

"Double zero," he said.

The croupier looked bored, which was the way a croupier should look. Gannett reached down and gave the wheel a spin and then stood back and waited. The croupier waited. Two women and one man, on Gannett's right, also waited. The ball clicked merrily, came to a stop. The wheel slowed, finally rested.

It wasn't double zero. Gannett reached for the croupier's rake and shoved his pile of chips back under the croupier's protecting right hand.

"Lousy wheel is fixed," Gannett said.

Nobody argued with him on that.

He uncorked his scotch bottle and took a long pull. Nobody objected to that, either, the croupier still looked bored; and the two women and the one man waited patiently for the Day of Judgment.

Gannett went over to a cashier window and reached in and got a handful of silver dollars. He took them to the machines over against the far wall and stuck in a couple and pulled the two handles simultaneously. For his investment he got back five dollars, which one of the machines disgorged with a loud clatter. He put more dollars in. He put them in fast and pulled the levers fast. He went down the entire row of machines and pulled the levers as he went. He didn't linger to see what happened at any of them.

He began to feel cold. He took out his scotch bottle again and half emptied it. A woman who looked as if she were someone's great-grandmother, except that her hair was bleached and fingernails were sharp talons, and who sat in a chrome and leather chair not six feet away from him, stared a little disapprovingly. Gannett caught the look.

"Lady," he said defensively, "I earned me a holiday, see? It's none of your business if I do some celebrating, is it?"

The lady didn't change her mind. She looked as though she might prefer gin herself.

Gannett belched. He wasn't so cold now. He threw back his head and laughed and listened to the sound of it bounce off walls. He did it again. He was feeling fine.

He went back to the roulette wheel, got around behind it and nudged the croupier gently. The croupier went over like a broom sliding down the side of a wall.

Gannett picked up the little plastic rake and looked at the two women and one man.

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"Place your bets, folks," he said, in a low tone that was a pretty good imitation of the drone of a professional man.

He separated the chips into four neat piles. He pushed a pile each at the two women, one to the man. The last he kept for himself.

"Place your bets, folks," he repeated.

Nobody did, but that was okay anyhow. Grinning happily, he made bets for them. One of the women—the one that was redheaded—looked to him as if she might be a plunger. He shoved her pile of chips over onto zero and then he gave her a friendly little wink. The other woman was the careful type, he thought. Her chips—not all of them, of course—he shoved for red. He disposed of the man perfunctorily: ten dollars on plain number nine. His own bet was due a little more deliberation. He carefully spread around five hundred dollars until the strip looked as if eighteen people were playing it all at once.

The effort made him sweat. He reached for his bottle, emptied it, then dropped it on the fallen croupier.

"Folks," Gannett said in an apologetic tone, "you'll have to pardon me a minute. It seems I'm out of fuel. Don't go away; I'll be right back."

Everybody was agreeable. Gannett went back to the bar, went around behind it.

He said to the barman: "I got a party out there, Doc. A big party, see? The house might stand to make a mint. How's about drinks?"

The barman considered it. The barman was still considering it when Gannett went back to the wheel with a fifth of scotch and four glasses and a dish of olives. He made drinks. In each one he put an olive. By this time, of course, he was getting a little loud, but nobody could blame him for that. When the drinks were made and placed before the two women and the man, he was ready. He grinned around, rubbed his hands together and winked a sly little leering wink at the redhead.

The wheel spun, stopped. Zero. The redhead had brought down the house.

"By God!" whispered Gannett in frank admiration. "Lady, you sure got luck. 'Nother little snifter just to nail it tight?"

Gannett liked the idea. He drank her drink for her and made a face over the olive. He poured another. He made more bets for everybody and then thought of something. Excusing himself once more, he got a roll of quarters from the cashier cage and, breaking it open, fed them into a big glittering juke box over in the

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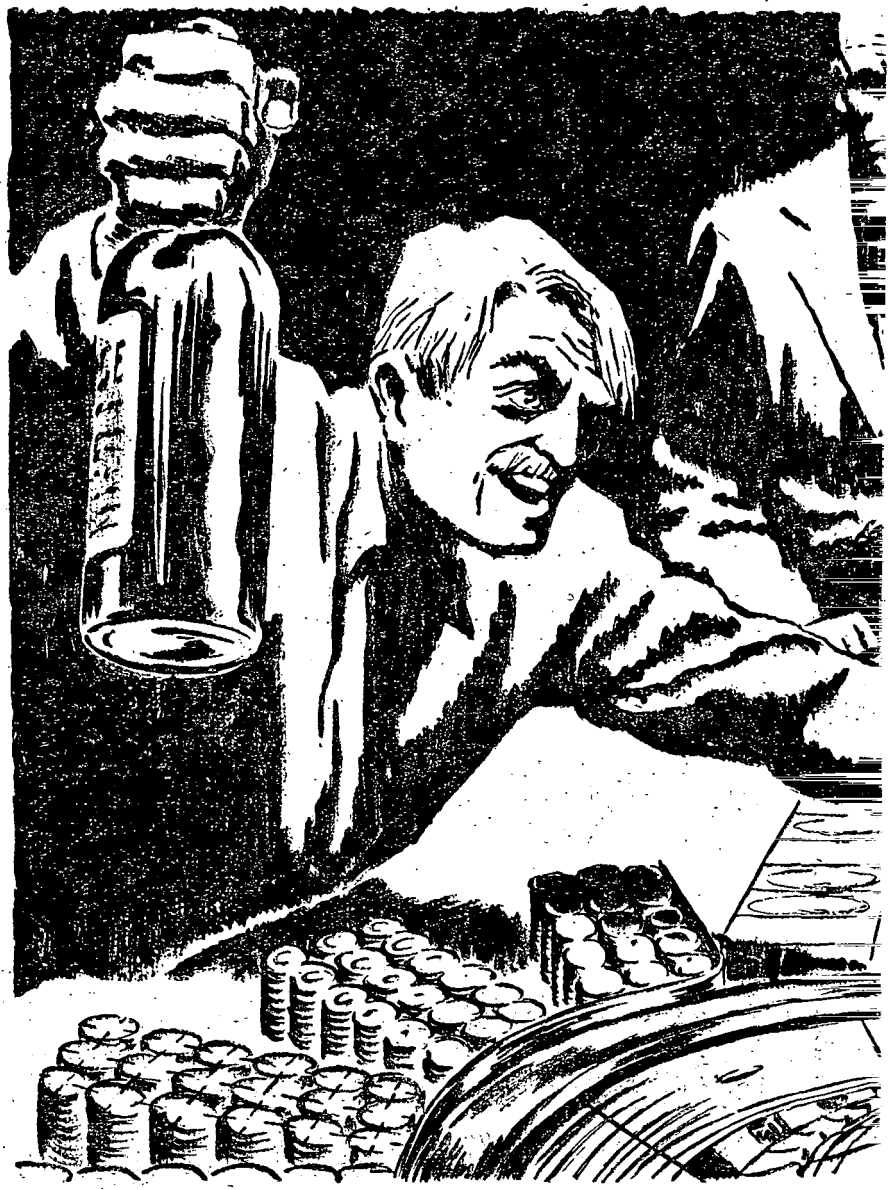

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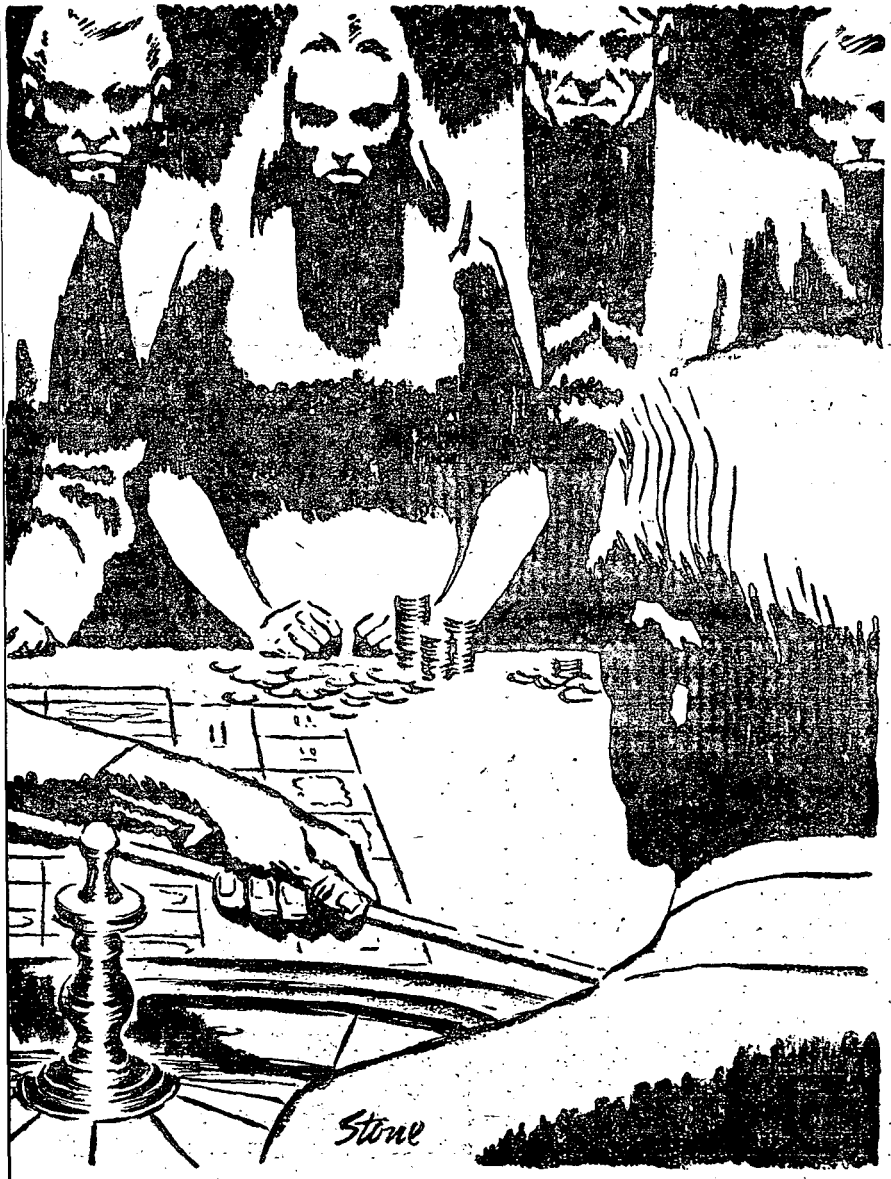

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corner. That done, he pushed down a row of tabs and went back to the table.

Everybody seemed to be having a time. The redhead just couldn't lose. Three separate times Gannett was forced to collect chips from other tables in order to keep the game going, but he didn't mind. He even said to the redhead once:

"Lady, ten more minutes and we sign the joint over to you. But have fun; you're doing swell."

Once more he consulted the thoughtful barman, and more than once he had to go back to the juke box and punch tabs, but that was all right. He liked music.

At ten minutes past three in the morning, with all the chips in the place before the lucky redhead he finished his last bottle.

He lifted his eyes and considered a crystal chandelier which hung from the exact center of the broad ceiling. It was a beautiful chandelier. It looked as though it might have graced the banquet hall of some castle over in England, back in the days when England was a tight little isle. He grinned appreciatively at it. He pitched the empty bottle upward.

There was a crash. Half the lights in the place went out.

Bowing solemnly to the scattered immobile figures, Gannett lurched to the big door up front. He tried a bow to the friendly floorman, but it didn't quite go over. He banged through the doors and out into the street.

GANNETT groaned his aching body out of bed and padded heavily to the window. He put his big hands on the sill and looked out. Purple snow was falling on a quiet world. The flakes came down softly, big wet, colored things like fluffy bits of cotton candy escaping from a circus in the sky. There was his jeep down on the street where he had left it. He could recognize it, for it was the only jeep on the block.

"Then it wasn't no lousy dream," he said miserably.

He went back to the bed and sat down on the edge of it. He recalled the headlines in the paper.

"Them lousy Reds," he whispered. "They done this, sure as hell."

That made him think a little. Everybody was dead, even the redhead in the Golden Bubble who couldn't lose.

"What the hell am I doin' alive, then?" he asked himself.

There was no answer to that. He thought of his mine, *The Lousy Disappointment,* and wondered if, living most of the time below the surface as he did, he had been protected from some sort of purple gas or something

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that seemed to have killed off everybody else. It could be. Some very light gas, maybe, that wouldn't seep below the surface.

"Aw, for cripe sakes!" he grunted disgustedly.

He dressed and left the room. He went downstairs. There was the lobby, all soft, quiet carpeting and soft, quiet furniture and soft, quiet drapes. A sheet of paper on a writing desk said *Grand Pachappa*. He was in a hotel, then. He must have wandered into it after he left the Golden Bubble.

He carefully avoided looking at two well-dressed women who sat in lobby chairs, staring off into nothing, but he felt their presence chillingly. He shivered. He made his way outside, the purple snow coming down and giving his cheeks wet, cold caresses. He angrily brushed them off, but they came down anyway. Above the snow, the sky was a sodden mass of purplish gray.

He found a restaurant that was open. A few customers sat on the stools like statues in a museum. All the coffeemakers were on the electric stove, but they were dry and clean except one that had no bottom in it any more and was quite discolored. Beneath it, the round electric coil still glowed faithfully.

He grabbed up one of the clean pots and took it to the metal rinse sink and reached for the faucet. And then his hand froze. What if the water was tainted? He had no way of finding out if it didn't carry that identifying purplish tint. He tried the faucet. It did.

The milk in the refrigerator was three weeks old, of course. Gannett ended by opening a bottle of Pepsi Cola for breakfast.

The sky stayed leaden, but even so there were many things apparent now that he hadn't seen the night before. A lack of heavy traffic on the streets would seem to indicate that what had happened—purple gas or whatever—had been very late at night; even so, traffic accidents were everywhere. There was one big sedan with its front end crushed against the First Olympic Bank. There was one cop who had died trying to tie his right shoe—his fingers still clutched the laces. There was a doctor (his car had a caduceus emblem on the windshield) who had just stepped down to the street, his bag in his left hand and his right hand on the door, ready to slam it shut. He had a serious, purposeful look on his face that even the falling purple snow couldn't quite eradicate.

Despite the cold, sweat frosted Gannett's forehead. He made his way to a radio and television store and kicked in a glass panel of the front door. Stepping through to the clamor of the sud-

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denly aroused night-warning bell, he went directly to a TV set and turned it on.

The big screen tube flickered after a while and a scratching hum came out of the speaker, but nothing happened. He tried all the channels. Nothing.

He tuned in a big radio console next, going carefully and slowly across the dial with a hand that shook. Even though the night-warning bell was kicking up quite a racket, he could tell after a moment or two.

Nothing . . .

THE sky was getting dark as Gannett left the store. The purple snow still fell. It was then that he noticed for the first time the gay street decorations in preparation for Christmas. Big paper bells with plenty of glittering tinsel and electric lamps inside them.

On the corner of First and Virginia, he saw a big iron kettle of some Salvation Army Santa. Hanging from its metal tripod, it looked quite natural, except that it was filled with purple snow; and the Santa who was supposed to ring his little bell was holding it stiffly over his head. He and the bell were frozen silent.

There was a large department store. Inside, in the show window, was a Christmas display that would delight the kiddies. There was a big Christmas tree trimmed with every imaginable ornament.

Beneath the tree, electrically activated toy soldiers jerked robotlike through their precise military designations, their lithographed faces looking stern and very brave. There was a clown who did uncounted somersaults; a lifelike doll who clapped her hands in glee. There was an aluminum bomber with a wingspread of three feet—it was held in the air by almost invisible wires — and its six propellers droned in perfect unison, making a brisk little wash that rustled the silk of the little doll's dress. And around the base of the tree, through valley and over mountain, into tunnel and over spiderweb trestle, was a railroad track. It should have had busy little trains on it, except that it didn't —the trains had been derailed at a whistle stop called North Pole.

Gannett's eyes twitched.

The sky grew darker; the purple snow continued to fall silently. Gannett went by the Masonic Lodge, the YMCA, and crossed the little stone bridge over the frozen Truckee River. He came to the heavy gray stone building of First Community Church.

He stopped in front of the church and stared at it. It was a solid, respectable-looking building. It was a very nice thing, indeed, to have here in Reno.

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NOT A CREATURE WAS STIRRING

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"Christmas Eve," Gannett whispered through cold lips. "This is Christmas Eve!"

He went up six purple-snow-covered stone steps. He reached the top where the stone steps ended and where the big square stone slab was, that slab where the minister stands when the weather is fair, and shakes hands with the congregation after the service.

Somewhere above, in the steeple, bells struck off the hour of eight. A timing device did that. Many churches had such timing devices to save labor. And as though that were a signal, a loudspeaker, attached way up on the spire especially for this festive season, began to growl out preparatory scratching noises, like a big metal monster clearing its throat.

Gannett pulled on the wrought brass handles of the closed oaken door. The door didn't budge. He grabbed the handles, in both hands and braced his feet. He pulled hard. The door was locked.

"God," he whispered hoarsely. "God, this is me. I gotta get in, God. God, listen, *I gotta get in!*"

High above, in the steeple, the loudspeaker was finally ready with a cheerful little carol.

"*God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen!*" the voices of a dead choir roared out upon the silent city.

—DEAN EVANS

NEXT MONTH'S CONTENTS PAGE

BOOK-LENGTH SERIAL—*Installment 1*

THE DEMOLISHED MAN ..... by Alfred Bester

NOVELETS

THE GIRLS FROM EARTH ..... by Frank M. Robinson
HALLUCINATION ORBIT ..... by J. T. M'Intosh

SHORT STORIES

DEAD END ..... by Wallace Macfarlane
THE FURIOUS ROSE ..... by Dean Evans
THE ADDICTS ..... by William Morrison

FEATURES

EDITOR'S PAGE ..... GALAXY'S FIVE STAR SHELF

Take our word for it—THE DEMOLISHED MAN is a novel you won't want to miss! It's brilliantly ingenious, packed with glittering ideas, fascinating characters, solar-hot conflict . . . Or don't take our word; buy the issue and see for yourself!

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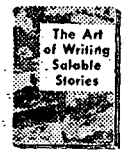

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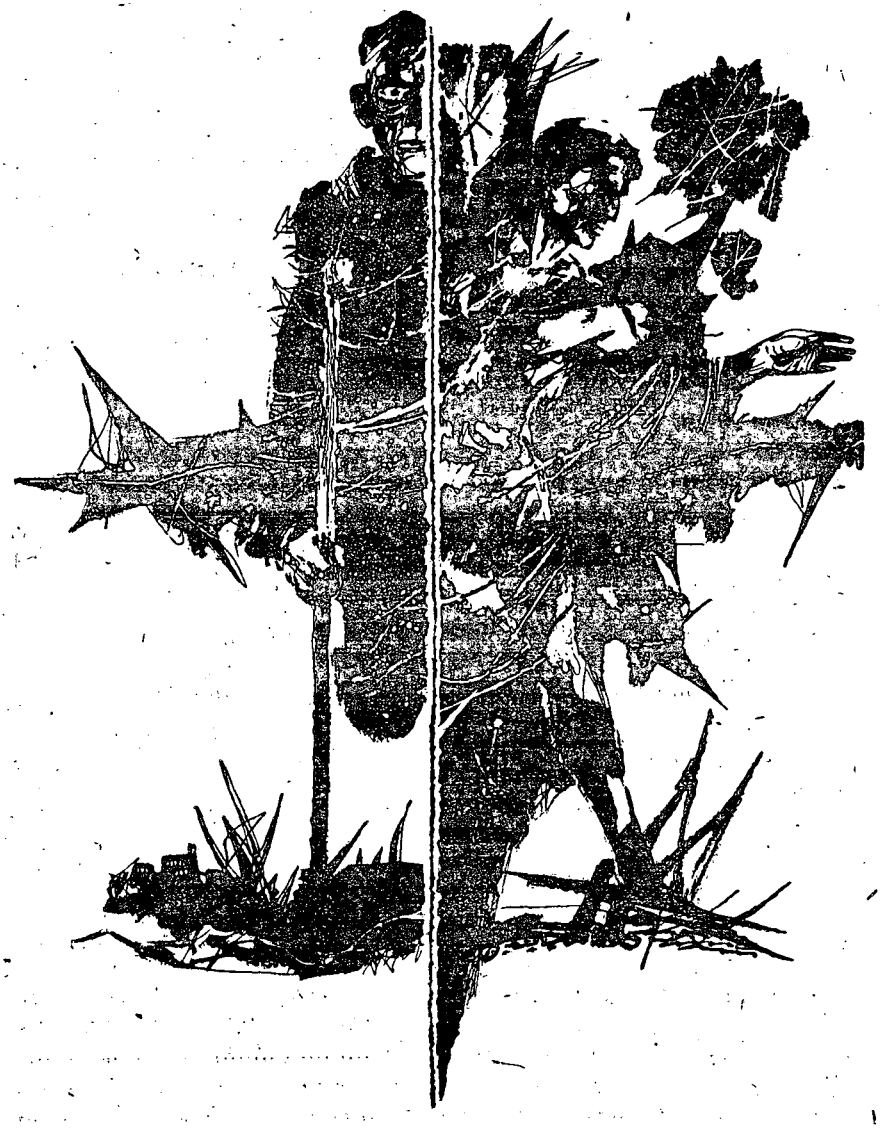

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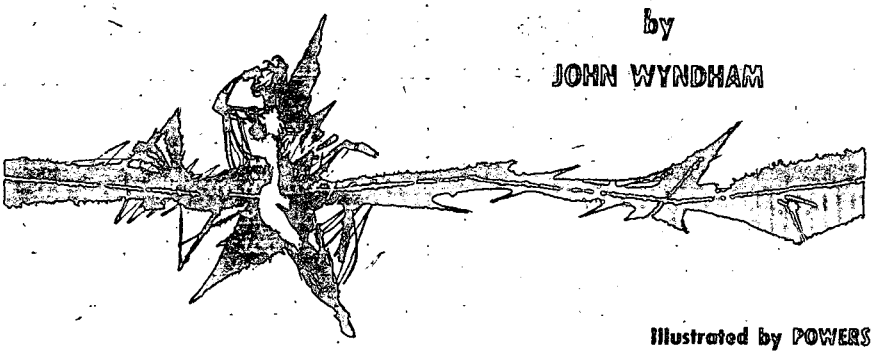
Pillar to Post

by

JOHN WYNDHAM



Illustrated by POWERS

Naturally the amputee wanted to stay out of his body for good . . . but you can't blame the man of the future for wanting to escape it!

Forcett Mental Clinic
Delano, Conn.
28th Feb.

Messrs. Thompson & Handett
Attorneys-at-Law
512 Gable Street
Philadelphia, Pa.

Gentlemen:

In response to your request, we have conducted a thorough examination of our patient, Stephen Dallboy, and have established his identity beyond legal question. Attested documents in support of this are enclosed, and dispose entirely of his claim to the Terence Molton property.

At the same time we admit we are bewildered. The condition of the patient has altered quite radically since our last examination, when he was indubitably feebleminded. Indeed, but for this obsession that he is Terence Molton, which he maintains with complete consistency, we should

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now classify him as normal. In view of the obsession and the remarkable assertions with which he supports it, we feel that he should remain here under observation, which may give us the opportunity of dispelling the whole fantasy system—and at the same time of clearing up several points we find puzzling.

In order that you may more clearly understand the situation, we are enclosing a copy of a statement written by the patient, which we suggest you study before reading our concluding remarks.

STATEMENT BY TERENCE MOLTON

I KNOW this is difficult to believe. In fact, when the thing first happened, I didn't believe it myself. I figured it was just a stage, maybe, in the deteriorating process. I've had enough dope long enough to play hell with my nervous system—yet the funny thing was how real it seemed right away. Still, I thought, everything would seem real to De Quincey when he was coked up, and to Coleridge, too.

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw . . .

Vision is a poor word—all quality and no quantity. How strong was that vision? Could he put out his hand and touch the babe? He heard her sing, but did she speak to him? And did he find himself a new man, free from pain? I guess even the milk and honey of Paradise are relative. Some would yearn for a kind of celestial Hollywood, but just having no pain and being complete would have been Paradise enow for me.

It had been just over four years since that mine had got me—four years, nine operations and more to come. Interesting for the doctors, no doubt, but it had turned me into just a hulk in a wheelchair, with only half of one leg and no feet at all under the blanket.

"Go easy on the dope," the surgeon had warned me.

"What'll happen if I don't?" I asked.

"You don't want to become an addict, do you?"

That was funny. If they'd given me anything else to stop the pain, I wouldn't have wanted to risk addiction. But they didn't have anything else. And if they had refused me dope, I'd have killed myself. They knew that. So the nurses gave it to me, though always trying to talk me into cutting down.

And there was Sally. She used to come to the hospital every visiting day, bringing me candy or books and cigarettes, and lean-

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ing over the bed to kiss me, with that gentle little smile that needs only a word to turn it into hopeless weeping.

I finally said, "Look, Sally, this isn't doing you or me any good. The sample I showed you was a healthy young guy. What you'd get now isn't anything like the sample. Why don't you go find somebody who is?"

Poor kid, it nearly broke her up. She argued out of mistaken loyalty, but I didn't want her on my conscience. They tell me her husband's a good joe and the baby is cute. Some of the nurses and Gray Ladies thought I was brooding about it. The fact is this is how I figure it should be.

All the same, when every woman you see is kind to you—in about the same way she would be to a sick dog—

Oh, well, there was always the dope.

And then, when I wasn't expecting anything at all except more pain and misery, there was this . . . this *vision.*

THE day had been a rotten one for me. My right leg and my left foot were hurting a lot. But most of the right leg had been taken off and the left foot had had to go, too, a little later, so nothing could be done about it except to reach for the bottle.

Maybe I took a little more than usual, but for all the difference it made to anyone else, I might as well be doped to the eyes all the time.

I lay back, feeling the pain fade out. I seemed to float smoothly and gently up and away, disembodied, filled with a surging lightness. The pain must have made me pretty tired, I guess, because I could feel myself falling asleep before I'd even begun to enjoy the lack of it . . .

When I opened my eyes, there, in front of me, was the vision of the damsel. She didn't have a dulcimer, and she certainly did not look Abyssinian, but she was singing, very quietly. It was an odd song, and for all I knew it might have been about Mount Abora, because I couldn't understand a word of it.

We were in a room—well, yes, it was a room, though it was more like being inside a bubble. It was all cool green, with a soft opalescence, and the walls curving up so you couldn't tell where they became ceiling. There were two arched openings in the sides. Through them were tree tops and a patch of blue sky. Close to one of them, the girl was fiddling with something I couldn't see.

She glanced toward me, and saw that my eyes were open. She turned and said something that sounded like a question, but it meant absolutely nothing to me.

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I just looked back at her.

She was worth looking at. A tall, beautifully proportioned figure, with brown hair caught back by a ribbon. The material of her dress was diaphanous, yet there was a vast amount of it, arranged in multitudes of cunning folds. It made me think of the pre-Raphaelites' versions of the classical. It must have been cobweb-light, for as she moved it swirled and hesitated in mid-air. The result was like that frozen high-wind effect so popular in late Greek sculpture.

When I did not reply, she frowned a little and repeated her question. I did not pay a lot of attention to the words. As a matter of fact, I was thinking: "Well, that's that; I've had it," and deciding that I was now in some kind of anteroom to Heaven, or—well, anyway, an anteroom. I wasn't scared, not even greatly surprised. I remember feeling, "That's a nasty experience finished with," and wondering a little that the prelude to eternity should resemble certain Victorian schools of painting.

When I still did not answer, her dark eyes widened a little. There was a look of wonder in them, perhaps a slight tinge of alarm, as she came toward me. Slowly she said:

"You—are—not—Hymorell?"

Her English had a strange accent, and anyway I did not know what hymorell meant. I might be, or I might not. She went on:

"Not—Hymorell? Some—other—person?"

It sounded as if Hymorell was a name.

"I'm Terry," I told her. "Terry Molton."

There was a block of the green stuff near me. It looked hard and cold, but she sat down on it and stared at me, her expression half-disbelief mixed with surprise.

By this time I was beginning to discover myself. I was lying on a remarkably soft couch with some kind of blanket over me that smoothed itself out when I turned, instead of getting bunched under me. I don't know how they got it to do that. It moved all the way down what should have been my right leg—including what would have been my right foot, if I'd had one.

I sat up suddenly, feeling my legs, both of them. There wasn't any pain. But there were two legs and two feet!

Then I did something I hadn't let myself do in years—I burst into tears.

SHE began speaking to me in uncertain, foreign English, and I remember wondering how there could be a language problem at the gates of Paradise. But I was more concerned with myself. I

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threw back the blanket and sat staring at the legs.

"They're not mine," I said dazedly, and then looked at the hand with which I felt them. "That's not mine, either."

"Of—course," she said hesitantly. "How could—they be?"

"I can wriggle the toes and bend the fingers, so what's the difference? You can't expect any sense in a dream."

I don't recall what we talked about then. I suppose I was too excited and bewildered to take it all in. I do know she told me her name—Clytassamine—and I remember thinking it was a real mouthful. But what seemed more important was to swing the legs over the side and stand on them.

For the first time since that mine got me, I *stood!*

There's no sense going into a lot of detail. What I might say would be about as informative as a Trobrian Islander's first impression of New York. I just had to take most things on trust, the way he would.

"You need—the word is—garments, is it not?" she asked.

I certainly did. Staying in a hospital for four years, you get to think of women as nurses, so I hadn't been aware of it. She didn't seem concerned and that helped me not to be. She stood me in a little cubicle that must have taken my measurements somehow, because clothes came out of a slot in the wall. There was a whale of a lot of it, and not a seam to be seen. Pretty filmy and ridiculous, it seemed to me, but it satisfied her, so I let her help me put it on. When I was dressed, she opened the door.

"You mean I have to go out in this damned nightgown?" I demanded.

"We all—dress—this way," she said. "In other garments—people—notify."

It stopped me for a moment. "Notice?" I asked.

"Notice," she corrected herself without self-consciousness. "Come."

We emerged into a great hall built of the same green composition. I figured that if Manhattan were to sink into the Hudson River, Grand Central Station under water would look about the way this place did.

A number of people were around, none of them hurrying. All their clothes were of the filmy stuff, but as far as color and design went, it was apparently each to his own taste. There was a deadening of sound that I found oppressive, perhaps because you'd normally expect an echo in a huge place like this, whereas our slippers were silent on the floor and the quiet voices made only a soft hum.

Clytassamine led the way to a

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row of double seats set against the wall and pointed to an end seat. I sat down experimentally in it, and she sat confidently beside me.

The seat rose about four inches from the floor and began to drift across the room.

"Are you sure this is all right?" I asked, worried.

"This is — conveyance. You — traveled?—went?—only by foot and by—animal?"

I looked at her in astonishment. "Are you kidding? I've been in cars, planes, tanks, ships, trains."

Did she think I came from a farm?

IN the middle of the great room, we turned and slid silently toward an arch at the far end, and out into the open air. We rose until we had an elevation of a yard or so above the ground, while, from the shallow platform to which the seat was attached, a curved windshield came up to cover us.

We accelerated to twenty-five miles an hour, I'd say, and swept smoothly across parklike country, traveling a course between occasional trees and clumps of bushes. I suppose she was navigating the contraption in some way, but I couldn't see how. In every way except speed, it was a better way to travel than anything else I've known—more in the magic carpet class.

It was a strange journey; something over an hour, I imagine, and in all that time we never crossed nor even saw a road, though twice I noticed paths that didn't seem to be used much.

"No cultivated fields or gardens?" I asked.

She looked blank. I tried to explain in terms of food, but that didn't clear anything up. She seemed completely unfamiliar with the *idea* of vegetables or grains, which increased my feeling that I was in a spirit world where we were supposed to live on ambrosia. There were deerlike creatures that paid us no attention. I was afraid to ask if they were raised as meat animals.

The only signs of humanity were occasional large buildings to be seen above the trees, but they weren't on our course. The trees were, though. Every time we came to a section of woods, I tried to pull back on a nonexistent stick and hop over it, but apparently the contraption didn't work that way, for we always went around and not over obstacles.

"Are you just showing me the sights, or are we heading anywhere in particular?" I wanted to know.

Both concepts gave her trouble. "All—things are sights," she said, after I'd done my best to explain. "If nowhere to go, stay—

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home. With you it is—otherwise?"

She should have seen weekend traffic. I didn't describe it because by that time I began to catch glimpses of a building on a hill ahead of us.

I'm no architect and I can't say this part showed this kind of influence and that part something else. It wouldn't have made much difference if I could have, though, because every building I had ever seen had been based on some geometrical pattern. This looked more as if it had *grown*. Bushes came close up against it, and a lot were even sprouting on top. The only reason I was sure it was a building was that it couldn't be anything natural.

As we got nearer, I became still more bewildered. I could see now that what I had thought to be small bushes were full-grown trees—even those on top of it. The place was unbelievably immense. Then, in the midst of my amazement, I remembered myself, and smiled. The dope dream was running true to form:

> It was a miracle of rare device,
> A sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice.

But when we arrived, it wasn't at all like that. It rose before us like a cleverly designed artificial mountain. We swept into it through an entrance sixty yards wide and several hundred feet high, to emerge into a central hall of staggering size.

There was no suggestion whatever of "pleasure dome," though something of the "caves of ice" feeling came from the translucency of the pearly walls.

MORE slowly, and seeming to drift like a feather in an air current, we floated across the place. There were a few men and women walking in a leisurely fashion, and a few chairs gliding as our own did.

"A kind of railroad terminal?" I asked.

She didn't get it, nor did airfield, bus station or waiting room mean anything to her. I gave up and watched us go through the enormous hall and through a dozen or more passages and lesser halls, wondering how she could find her way. But I wasn't too surprised—it always puzzles me how people can get around in cities I don't know, especially where the streets have names instead of numbers.

We came to a relatively small hall, where a dozen or so men and women were gathered, apparently waiting for us. There the chair stopped. It lowered the few inches to the floor and we got out, whereupon, in a way that could happen only in a dream, it lifted just clear and drifted away to the

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wall, as if parking itself.

Clytassamine spoke to the group of people and indicated me. They nodded gravely in my direction. It seemed the polite thing to do, so I nodded back. Then, with her as interpreter, a kind of catechism began.

I think it was during that questioning that I really began to feel there was something seriously wrong with my dream. They wanted to know my name, where I came from, what I did, what had happened to my legs and why, what war and hospital meant, and a great deal more, and the answers I gave made them frown bafflingly and pause now and then to confer.

It was all very logical and detailed, which was wrong. Dreams —my dreams, at any rate—have a more cinematic quality. They do not proceed in smooth sequence, but jump suddenly from one scene to another, as though directed by an erratic and impatient psychotic. But this was not at all like that. I was acutely aware of what was going on, both physically and mentally.

At last Clytassamine said, "They wish you — learn — language. More easy to—speak."

"That's going to take a long while," I said, because not a single word that any of them had spoken had been familiar to me.

"No. Few thlana."

"How much?"

"Quarter day," she explained. "A lousy linguist like me? I wasn't even able to learn pig-Latin!"

She didn't answer or argue. She gave me some food—a box of things that looked like candy and tasted good. They weren't sweet or very big, but only a few took care of my hunger.

"Now — sleep," said Clytassamine, pointing to a cold, unfriendly-looking block of the green stuff.

I got on it and found that it was neither chilly nor hard. I lay there worriedly, wondering if this was the end of the dream and I would wake up to find myself back in my own bed, with the old pain where my legs ought to be. But I didn't wonder long. There must have been some drug in the food.

WHEN I awoke, I was still there. Hanging over me was a kind of canopy of rose-colored metal which had not been there before. It was—I'm going to give up trying to describe things; there was too much basic unfamiliarity. What would an ancient Egyptian know of a telephone by looking at it? What would a Roman or a Greek make of a jet plane or a radio. And as for TV—!

Coming right down to the simple things, if you saw a slab of

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chocolate for the first time, you might think it was for mending shoes, lighting the fire, or building houses. About the last use you'd guess for it would be eating—and, when you did find out, you'd most likely try eating soap because the texture was similar and the color more attractive.

That's the way it was with me. You grow up with your conditioning complete. You look at a machine and you don't have to say to yourself, "Ah, that works by steam, or gasoline, or electricity," because you know, and you generally have a good idea of what the machine does without having to think about it.

But nearly all of what I was seeing now was foreign to me. I had no place to start. Not understanding what might cut or burn me if I touched it, I was scared of everything—just like a child or an aborigine. Naturally, I floundered around with wild guesses, but mostly they had to remain just that.

I guessed now that the canopy was part of a hypnotic teaching machine, something like those the Navy tried to use to teach Morse Code. I guessed that, however, because I found I could now understand what the people were saying—some of it, at least—but the concepts behind the language were totally alien. I knew only what I could translate directly.

The word "thlana" that Clytassamine had used, for example, I now knew was a measure of time—one hour and twelve minutes, making twenty thlana to the day—so I'd been out about five thlana, almost six hours. "Dool" was electricity, but "laythal" meant nothing to me. I knew it was some form of power and that was all, not where it came from or what it did, though Clytassamine did her best to explain:

"The mizmo is changed into frengra, and that produces laythal. But it has to be senaced, of course, before it can be baxtoa."

It wasn't her fault. You try explaining how coal and water are converted into electricity without using terms that are unfamiliar to an illiterate, and laythal, as I understood it, was even more complicated. But these difficulties had the effect of enhancing the dreamlike quality. The utter blankness of certain words or ideas which kept cropping up, like the dead keys of an old piano, began to get me down.

"ENOUGH, Clytassamine," a man said, when my distress must have begun to show pretty plainly. "Take him away and look after him."

The relief was almost physical as I sat down beside her again on one of the flying seats. I sighed and relaxed finally as it floated

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us back once more into the open air.

EVEN before I understood anything about this unfamiliar world, I was somewhat awed by Clytassamine's power of mental adjustment. It seemed to me that it must be a frightening experience, discovering that a person you have known for a long while has without warning become a perfect stranger — with, maybe, unpredictable reactions. Yet she showed no alarm, and only occasionally made the slip of calling me Hymorell.

I realized why somebody recovering consciousness usually demands first of all, "Where am I?" I wanted to know that very much; without that information, I didn't seem to be able to get my thinking started properly. There was no fixed point to begin from.

When we were back in the green room again, I began to ask questions. She looked at me doubtfully.

"You should rest. Simply relax and don't worry. We will look after you. If I were to try to explain, I would bewilder you more."

"You couldn't," I told her. "Nothing could. I've got to the stage where I can't pretend this is a dream any longer. I've got to get some kind of orientation or go crazy."

She looked at me closely again, and then nodded. "Very well. But where am I to begin? What is most urgent?"

"I want to know where I am, who I am, and how it happened."

"As to who you are, you know that. You told me you are Terry Molton."

"But this—" I slapped my left thigh—"this isn't Terry Molton."

"Temporarily it is," she said. "It was Hymorell's body, but now all the qualities that make it individual—mentality, personality, character — are yours. Therefore, it is Terry Molton's body."

"And what happened to Hymorell?"

"He has transferred to what was your body."

"Then he's made a damn bad deal," I told her. I thought for a moment. "That doesn't make sense. I'm not the same as I was before I was shot up. Physical differences make mental differences. Injuries and dope changed mine to some extent—if they'd done it more, I'd have a completely different personality."

"Who told you that?"

"Common sense."

"And your scientists postulate no constant? Surely there must be some constant factor not affected by changes. And if there is that factor, may it not be a cause rather than an effect?"

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"As I understand it, it's simply a matter of balance—physical and psychological forces held in equilibrium."

"Then you *don't* understand it," she told me.

I decided to drop that angle for the moment.

"What is this place?" I asked.

"The building is called Cathalu."

"No, I mean where is it? Is it on Earth? It looks like Earth, but nowhere that I ever heard of."

"Of course it's Earth. Where else would it be? But it's in a different salany."

I WAS up against another of those blank words once more. Salany meant absolutely nothing to me.

"Do you mean it's in a different—?" I began, and then stopped, baffled. There didn't seem to be a word in her language for "time," at least in the sense I meant.

"I told you it would be bewildering," she said. "You think differently. In terms of old thinking—as near as I can understand it—you come from one end of the human race. Now you are at the other."

"But I don't," I protested. "There were some twenty million years of human evolution before me."

"Oh, that!" she said, airily dismissing those twenty million years with a wave of her hand.

"Well, at least," I went on desperately, "you can tell me how I got here."

"Roughly, yes. It is an experiment of Hymorell's. He has been trying for a long time—" in this straightforward sense, I noticed, there *did* seem to be a word for time—"but now he has made a new approach. A successful one at last. Several times before, he has almost done it, but the transfer did not hold. His most successful attempts were about three generations ago. He—"

"I beg your pardon?" I said.

She looked up questioningly. "Yes?"

"I thought you said he tried three generations ago."

"I did."

I got up from the block I'd been sitting on and looked out of the arched windows. It was a peaceful, sunny, normal-looking day out there.

"Maybe you were right—I'd better rest," I said.

"That's sensible," she agreed. "Don't bother your head about the hows and whys: After all, you won't be here long."

"You mean, I'll be going back—to be as I was?"

She nodded.

I could feel my body under the unfamiliar robe. It was a good

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body, strong, well-kept, lithe, whole, and there was no pain in it.

"No," I said. "I don't know where I am, or what I am now, but one thing I do know—I'm not going back to that hell."

She looked at me and shook her head pityingly.

THE next day, after we had fed on more of the candies that were not candies, and drunk an elusive-flavored milky stuff, she led the way into the hall and toward the chairs.

I stopped. "Can't we walk? It's a long time since I was able to."

"Why, yes, of course," she said, and we turned toward the doorway. Several people spoke to her, and one or two of them to me. There was curiosity in their eyes, but their manners were kindly, as though to set a stranger at ease. It was evident that they knew I was not Hymorell, yet they were too polite to mention it.

Outside, we walked across rough grass and found a path leading through a thicket. It was quiet, peaceful, Arcadianly beautiful. To me, feeling the ground beneath my feet as something precious, everything had the freshness of Spring. The blood livened in my veins in a way that I had forgotten.

"Wherever it is, it's lovely," I said, glancing around.

We walked on in silence for a while, until my curiosity came back.

"What did you mean by 'the other end of the human race?'" I asked her.

"Just that. We think we are coming to the end, finishing. We are practically sure of it, though there is always chance."

"I have never seen anyone more healthy or more beautiful," I said, looking straight at her.

She smiled. "It is a nice body. My best, I think."

For the moment, I ignored that baffling addition. "Then what is happening? Is it infertility?"

"No. There are not a great many children, but that is more a result than a cause. It is that something in us is failing to reproduce—the thing that makes us human instead of merely animal. We call it malukos."

The word translated as something like a spirit or a soul, yet not quite either.

"Then the children—?"

"Nearly all of them lack that. They are — feebleminded. If things go on this way, they will all be like that one day, and then it will be over."

I pondered that, feeling that I was back in the dream again.

"I don't know," she went on. "One doesn't think of the salany arithmetically, though there is

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the perimetrical approach."

I couldn't make sense of that. "Aren't there any records?"

"Oh, yes. That is how Hymorell and I learned your language. But there are very big gaps. Five times, at least, the race all but destroyed itself. There are thousands of years missing from the records at different periods."

"And how long is it going to be before it is all finished?" I asked.

"We don't know that, either. Our task is to prolong it because there is always chance. It *may* happen that the intelligence factors will become strong again."

"How do you mean, 'prolong it?' Prolong your own lives?"

"We transfer. When a body begins to fail, or when it is about fifty years old and getting past its best, we choose one of the feebleminded and transfer to that. This," she added, holding up her perfect hand and studying it, "is my fourteenth body. It's a very nice one."

I agreed. "But do you mean you can go on and on transferring?"

"As long as there are bodies to transfer to."

"But—but that's immortality."

"No," she said, scornfully, "nothing like it. It is just prolongation. Someday, sooner or later, there'll be an accident. That's mathematically inevitable. It might have been a hundred years ago, or it might be tomorrow—"

"Or a thousand years hence?" I suggested.

"Exactly, but one day it will come."

I did not for a moment doubt that she was telling me the truth, for by this time I was prepared for any fantastic situation. All the same, I revolted against it. I had an instinctive sense of disapproval—prejudice, of course, the same prejudice which made me disapprove of the soft, flowing garments and the soft, easy manner of life. I couldn't help feeling that the process she spoke of was allied to cannibalism in some symbolic fashion.

SHE must have read my expression, for she said, explaining, not excusing: "This body wasn't any good to the girl who had it. I don't suppose she was really even conscious of it. It was being wasted. I shall look after it. I shall have children. Some of them may be normal human children. When they grow old, they will be able to transfer. The urge to survival still exists, you see. Something may happen; someone may make a discovery to save us even now."

"And the girl who had this body? What happened to her?"

"Well, she had very little be-

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yond a few instincts. What there was changed places with me."

"Into a body aged fifty? Losing thirty years of life?"

"Can you call it loss when she was incapable of using it?"

I did not reply to that, for a thought had struck me. "So that's what Hymorell was working on! He was trying to transfer normal personalities from the past into feebleminded bodies! That's it, isn't it?"

She looked at me steadily. "He's been successful at last. It is a real transference this time."

I was strangely unsurprised. I suppose I had been working up to the realization before it actually came. But there was a lot I wanted to know about the why and how as I was affected. I asked her for more details.

"Hymorell wanted to get as far as possible," she told me. "The limit was the point where he could be sure of assembling the parts to make an instrument that would get him back here. If he went too far in history, certain essential metals would not be known, instruments would be inaccurate, electric power unavailable. In that case, it might take him years to build the instrument, if he could do it at all. The use of nuclear fission was the line he decided to draw. Further away than that, he thought, might be dangerous.

"Then he had to find a contact. It had to be a subject where the integration was not good—where there was a lesion weakening the attachment of the personality to the physical shape. When we perform the operation, we can prepare the subject, which is easy. But he had to find one already in a suitable state. Unfortunately, those he could find were nearly all on the point of death, but he found you at last and then he had to study the strength of your tie to life. He was puzzled because it fluctuated a great deal."

"That would be the dope," I suggested.

"Possibly. Anyway, he worked out a rhythmic incidence of lesion, and then tried. This is the result."

"I see," I said. "How long did he figure it would take him to build the instrument for his return?"

"He couldn't tell that. It depends on his facilities for assembling materials."

"Then it's going to take him quite a while, I'd say. A legless cripple wasn't a convenient subject to choose, from that point of view."

"But he'll do it."

"Not if I can help it," I told her.

She shook her head. "Once you have transferred, you never can have the perfect integration you

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had with your own body. If at no other time, he will put on more power and get at you when you're sleeping."

"We'll see about that," I said.

Afterward, I saw the instrument that Hymorell had used for the transfer. It was not large. In appearance, it was little more than a liquid-filled lens mounted upon a box the size of a portable typewriter, from which protruded two polished metal handles. But within the box there was enough intricacy of wiring, tubes, and strange gadgets to fill me with great satisfaction. No one, I said to myself, was going to knock a thing like that together in a few days, or even a few weeks.

THE days drifted the life by with them. That placidity which was their chief character-

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istic was, at first, restful. After that came periods when I wanted to go wild and break up something just for the diversion.

Clytassamine took me here and there in the great green building. There were concerts at which I understood not a thing. I sat there, bored and musing to myself while around me the audience went into an intellectual trance, finding something in the strange scales and queerer harmonies that was utterly beyond my perception.

And there was one hall where colors played on a large fluorescent screen. They seemed to be projected from the spectators themselves in some incomprehensible way. Everybody but me enjoyed it. You could feel that. And now and then, for no reason that I could perceive, they would all sigh or laugh together. Nevertheless, I thought some of the effects very pretty, and said so. By the way it was received, it was the wrong thing to say.

Only in the performances of three-dimensionally projected plays was I occasionally able to follow the action for a while—and when I thought I could, it usually shook me badly.

Clytassamine became impatient with my comments. "How can you expect to feel when you measure civilized behavior by primitive taboos?" she asked.

She took me to a museum. It was not like any I had thought of, being mostly a collection of instruments projecting sound or images, or both, according to selection. I saw some horrible things. We went back, back, and still further back in time. I wanted to see or hear something of my own time.

"There's only sound," she said.

"All right," I told her. "Let's have music."

She worked at the keyboard of the machine. Into that great hall, a familiar sound stole softly and mournfully. As I listened to it, I had a sense of emptiness and vast desolation. Memories flooded back as if the old world—not, oddly enough, the one I had left, but that in which I was a child—were suddenly around me. A wave of sentimentality, of overwhelming self-pity and nostalgia for all the hopes and joys and childhood that had vanished utterly engulfed me, and the tears streamed down my face.

I did not go to that museum again. And the music which conjured a whole world up from the aged dust? No, it was not a Beethoven symphony, nor a Mozart concerto.

It was *The Old Folks At Home.*

"DO you never work? Does nobody work?" I asked Clytassamine.

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"Oh, yes, if we want to."

"But what about the unpleasant things—the things that must be done?"

"What things?" she asked, puzzled.

"Well, growing food, providing power, making clothes, building, transportation . . ."

She looked surprised.

"Why, naturally, the machines do all that. You wouldn't expect men to do those things."

"But who looks after the machines and keeps them in order?"

"Themselves, of course. A mechanism that couldn't maintain itself wouldn't be a machine. It would be just a form of tool."

"Oh," I said. And I supposed it would, though the thought was new to me.

"Do you mean to say," I went on, "that for your fourteen generations — some four hundred years or so—you've done nothing but this?"

"Well, I've had quite a lot of babies. Three of them were quite normal. And I've worked on eugenic research from time to time. Almost everybody does when he thinks he's got a lead."

"But how can you stand it, just going on and on?"

"It is not easy sometimes and some of us do give up, but that is a crime, because there is always chance. And it's not quite so monotonous as you think. Each transfer makes a difference. You feel as if the world had become a different place then. Even in one body, tastes can change quite a lot in one lifetime, and they inevitably differ between bodies. But you are the same person, yet you are young again. You're hopeful, the world looks brighter, you think you'll be wiser this time. And then you fall in love again, just as sweetly and foolishly as before. It's wonderful, like a rebirth. You can know just how wonderful only if you have been fifty and then become twenty."

"I can guess," I said. "I was worse than just being fifty before this happened. But love? For four years, I haven't dared to think of love . . ."

"You dare now," she said. "Can't you?"

I could. I did.

THERE was so much I wanted to know. "What happened to *my* world?" I asked her later. "It seemed pretty well headed for disaster, as I saw it. I suppose it nearly wiped itself out in some

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vast and destructive global war?"

"It just died, the same as all the early civilizations. Nothing spectacular."

I thought of my world, its intricacies and complexities, the mastery of distance and speed, the progress of science.

"Just died?" I repeated. "It can't have. There must have been something that broke it up."

"Oh, no. The passion for order is a manifestation of the deep desire for security. The desire is natural, but the attainment is fatal. There was the means to produce a static world, which was achieved. When the need for adaptation arose, it found itself unable to adapt. It inertly died of discouragement. That happened to many primitive peoples before."

She had no reason to lie, but it was hard to believe.

"We hoped for so much," I protested. "Everything was opening before us. We were learning. We were going to reach out to other planets and beyond."

"Ingenious you certainly were, but each new discovery was a toy. You never considered its true worth. And you were a greedy, childishly aggressive people. You developed science without developing philosophy. Philosophy without science is fruitless speculation, likely to degenerate into superstition and ignorant quibbling. But science without philosophy is equally fruitless research that leads to pedantry, stasis, dogma."

"That's rather hard on us. We had very complex problems."

"Mostly concerned with preservation of forms and habits. It never seems to have occurred to you that in Nature life is growth, and preservation is an accident. What is preserved in the rocks or in ice is only the image of life, but you were always regarding local taboos as eternal verities."

My mind switched suddenly to my present situation. "But suppose I were to go back and tell them what is going to happen. It would alter things. Doesn't that show I'm not going back?"

She smiled. "You think they would listen to you while they neglect philosophy, Terry?"

"Anyway," I said, "I don't intend to go back. I don't like your world. I think it is decadent, and in many ways immoral, but at least I am a whole human being here."

She shook her head. "So young, Terry. So sure of right and wrong. It's rather sweet."

"It's not sweet at all," I said, brusquely. "There have to be standards. Without standards, where are you?"

"Well, where? Where's a tree, or a flower, or a butterfly?"

"We're more than plants."

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"What do you do about opposing standards? Go gloriously to war?"

I dropped that.

"Did we get to other planets?" I asked.

"No, but the next civilization did. They found Mars too old, Venus too young. You had a dream of men spreading out over the Universe; I'm afraid that never happened, though it was tried again later. They bred men specially for it as they bred them for all kinds of things. In fact, they produced some very strange men and women, highly specialized, who were even more zealous for order than your people—they would not admit chance, which is a great stupidity. When their end came, it was disastrous. None of the specialized types could survive. The population dwindled down to a few hundred thousand who had enough adaptability to start over again."

"So you have come to distrust order and standards?"

"We have ceased to think of society as a structural engineering problem, or of individuals as components for assembly into some arbitrary pattern."

"And you just sit and wait supinely for the end?"

"Oh, no! We preserve ourselves as material for chance to work on. Life was an accident in the beginning; survival has often been an accident. Maybe there'll be no more accidents. On the other hand, there may."

"That sounds very near defeatism."

"In the end, defeat and the cold must come. First to the Solar System, then the Galaxy, then the Universe, and the rest will be silence. Not to admit that is a foolish vanity." She paused. "Yet one grows flowers because they are lovely, not because one wishes them to live for ever."

I did not like that world. It was as foreign as another planet might have been. The strain to understand was constant and wearisome; it was also unprofitable. Whatever comfort and ease I had there were centered in Clytassamine. For her I pulled down the barriers I had so bitterly erected around myself in the last few years, and I fell the more deeply in love on account of them.

Thus there was a second reason not to let things happen as Hymorell had planned. Even Clytassamine could not make the place heaven, but I had got out of hell and I intended to stay out.

I spent unnumbered hours poring over the transference machine, learning all I could of it. My progress was slow, but some idea of the way it operated did begin at last to come to me.

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But I could not settle. The feeling of transience would not leave me, and the days began to pass in long, nagging uncertainty. There was no way of telling whether Hymorell would be successful in getting all the equipment he needed. I had a haunting, mind's-eye picture of him in my wheelchair, working away on the contrivance which would condemn me to suffering in that broken body again.

As the weeks went by, the strain began to affect me, and I grew tense. I was afraid to go to sleep lest the next time I woke I should find myself back in that chair.

Clytassamine, too, began to look worried. Her genuine sympathy over my distress at the idea of going back was confused by her feeling for Hymorell, who must now be suffering what I had. There was also the fact that my mental strain wasn't doing my temporary body any good, either.

And then, when six uneventful months had begun to give me hope, it happened without sign or warning. I went to sleep in the room of the great green building; I woke back home — with a raging pain in my missing leg.

All was just as it had been. So much so that I reached right away for the dope bottle.

When I grew calmer, I found

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something which had not been there before. It was on the table beside me, looking like a radio set partially assembled. I certainly had not built it. Except for that, the whole thing might have been a dream.

I leaned back in my chair, considering that mass of wiring very carefully. Then I started to examine it closely, touching nothing. It was, of course, crude in construction, compared with the transference machine I had studied in the place that Clytassamine had called Cathalu, but I began to see similarities and notice adaptations. I was still looking at it when I fell asleep.

By the number of hours I slept, I knew Hymorell must have been driving my body without letup.

WHEN I awoke, I began to think frantically. My spell of soundness and health had left me with one firm decision — I would not remain an amputee.

There were two ways out. The first, the dope bottle, had always been there for the taking and still was. But now there was the transference instrument.

I did not understand a lot about it. I doubted whether I could successfully retune it if I tried, and I did not wish to try. For one thing, little though I liked that other world, Clytassamine would be there to help me.

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For another, what I had learned made me think that I might easily land somewhere even less desirable. So I left it on Hymorell's setting.

The chief difficulty I foresaw was that the machine must remain. He had had to leave it, but had never guessed, I suppose, that I'd be able to use it. And if I were to use it, I'd have to leave it there for him to use again. My object must be to stop him doing that.

It would be risky to set the machine to destroy itself after I changed places with him. The process is to some extent hypnotic and by no means instantaneous. Something very queer indeed would be likely to happen if it were destroyed while the transmission was in progress.

Besides, he would be able to build another. As long as he existed, he would be able to.

That made the answer fairly obvious.

When I had made my plan, I tried the instrument several times, but he was awake and wary. I saw that I would have to catch him asleep, as he had caught me, so I went on trying at intervals of four hours.

I don't know whether he outguessed me or whether he was just lucky. I had got hold of the poison a year before to keep by me in case things became unbearable. My first idea was to swallow it in a capsule which would take some little time to dissolve. But then I realized what would happen if something went wrong and I could not make the transfer in time. That scared away from the scheme. Instead, I poured the poison into the dope bottle. The crystals were white, just like the dope itself, only a little larger.

Once I got a response from the instrument, it was easier than I had expected. I took hold of the two handles and concentrated all my attention on the lens. I felt giddy. The room swayed and blurred.

When it cleared, I was back in that green room, with Clytassamine beside me.

I reached my hand toward her, and then stopped, for I could hear her quietly crying. I had never known her to do that before.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

For a moment she went absolutely quiet. Then she said, incredulously: "It's — it's Terry?"

"Well, sure. I told you I wasn't going to be kept back there."

She started to cry again, but differently. I put my arm around her.

After a while, I asked: "What is it? What's all this about?"

She sniffed. "It's Hymorell. Your world has done something dreadful to him. When he came

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back, he was harsh and bitter. He kept talking of pain and suffering. I was afraid of him; he was — cruel."

It did not greatly surprise me, for they knew nothing of illness and physical discomfort. If a body became in the least defective, they transferred. They had never had to learn to bear suffering.

"Why didn't it do that to you, too?" she asked.

"I think it did at first," I admitted. "But you find out after a while that that just makes things tougher."

"I was afraid of him; he was cruel," she repeated.

I kept myself awake for forty-eight hours, to make sure. I knew that one of the first things he would need when he woke was the dope, but I had to give him time to take it. Then I let myself sleep.

When I opened my eyes, I was back in the hospital. It was no slow awakening. I knew in a flash that he had somehow suspected the bottle of poison and avoided it. The instrument was beside me and I saw a thin curl of smoke rising from it, as though a cigarette had been left burning. I began to reach toward it, but then caution checked me. I caught the leads and pulled them out. In among the wiring, I found a small can with a glowing fuse attached. I flung the can hastily through the window. He too, however, had had to allow a safety margin: it was half an hour before the explosive went off.

I looked at the dope. I needed it badly, but I didn't dare to touch it. I trundled my chair over to the cupboard where the spare supply was kept. When I took out the bottle, though, I hesitated. It looked like the real stuff and intact — but then, of course, it was essential that it should.

Deliberately, I threw it into the fireplace, smashing the bottle, and wheeled my chair to the telephone. The doctor was pretty nasty to me, but he came, bringing the stuff with him, thank God.

Various plans occurred to me. A poisoned needle, for instance, set strategically in the arm of the chair. But the disabled have so little privacy. It is difficult enough to get the deadlier poisons, anyway; when it can be done only by finding a third party ready to break the law, it becomes virtually impossible. And if someone did do it for me, he would later appear as an accessory to suicide. The same objection applied to laying my hands on a few sticks of dynamite. But I could buy a time-switch without any trouble — and I did.

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It was, I thought, a neat arrangement. My old Army pistol was trained on the exact position my head would occupy when I was at the instrument. Only if you were searching for it would you notice the muzzle looking out from the bookshelves. It was fixed to fire when the two handles of the instrument were grasped — but not until the time-switch was on. Thus I could set the switch and operate the instrument. Two hours later, for safe margin, the switch would go over and the thing became lethal. If I tried and failed to make contact. I had only to set the switch again.

I waited three days, knowing that Hymorell would be as wary of sleep as I had been, and uncertain whether his little grenade had been successful. Then I tried successfully.

But three days later, I was back again in my chair.

HYMORELL, damn him, was cautious; he must have spotted the extra lead to the switch right away. It had been snipped off.

But I found his little surprise package too — I would have melted the instrument, and most likely myself along with it, if I had touched it before disconnecting. (The switch was thermostatic this time, set to cut in as the room cooled down — very neat.)

The pistol and the time-switch had vanished, and I set about looking for them everywhere within range of my chair. I didn't find the pistol, but the switch was in the cupboard under the stairs. It was arranged to set off a percussion cap which would ignite a gray powder obviously taken from the pistol cartridges. There were paper and oily rags close by.

Once I had made sure there were no other boobytraps around. I settled down to work out another little reception device of my own. I had been caught by a type of mine the Germans used which didn't go up until the seventh truck had passed over it. The idea had its points.

I spent a couple of days fixing that. The transference machine, meanwhile, created other problems. I changed places with Hymorell, then returned involuntarily, and got back there again.

— I was getting sick of the game, but it seemed to be a duel which could only end with one of us outsmarting the other. It was a stupid battle with too many risks for both of us. And neither of us dared to sleep.

"Look here," I said to Clytassamine. "Suppose I were to transfer to one of the feebleminded the way you people do. Then when Hymorell operates again, it will be the halfwit who will take my place in the chair. We'll both be

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here and the whole thing will be solved."

She shook her head. "You need some sleep, Terry. You're getting fuddled. It's your *mind* he's working the exchange with. It wouldn't make any difference what kind of body you were using."

She was right, of course — I was fuddled. On the third day. I just had to sleep. It lasted about fourteen of their hours and I woke up in the green hall.

I couldn't believe he'd let that length of time pass without making an attempt, if he were in any condition to do so. My little gadget must have gotten rid of him this time.

I began to feel easier.

AS the days went on, I grew sure of my success. My dread of sleep diminished. At last I began to feel like a citizen of this other world and to look for my place in it. With unlimited time ahead of me, I didn't intend to spend it hanging around the way the rest of them did.

"Maybe there *is* only chance now," I said to Clytassamine, "but didn't you ever hear of *making* chances?"

She smiled, it seemed to me, a little wearily.

"Yes," she admitted, "I know. I felt like that for my first two generations. You are so young, Terry." She sat looking at me wistfully and a little sadly.

Why the change should suddenly have come over me then, I can't say. Maybe it wasn't that sudden, but had been working up a while; as I looked back at her, I found myself seeing her quite differently. A cold feeling came over me. I saw beyond her perfect form and young loveliness.

Inside, she was old — old and wearied — old far beyond my reach. She thought of me as a child, and had been treating me as one. The vigor of my true youth had amused her. Perhaps it revived her own for a while. Now she was tired of it and of me. The freshness I had seen was nothing but a sham.

I must have stared at her quite a while. "You don't want me any more. You want Hymorell."

"Yes, Terry," she admitted quietly.

For the next day or two I pondered over what to do. I had never liked that world. It was effete and decaying. What pleasantness there had been had vanished. I felt imprisoned, stifled, appalled at the prospect of spending several lifetimes in it.

Now that a return to my former torment seemed improbable, the prospect here looked, in another way, little better. I began to wonder whether mortality wasn't one of life's more desirable qualities. It's frightening in most

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ways, but more frightening was the prospect of an almost eternal existence. You can't believe that until you're faced with it.

But my worry was unnecessary; I'm in no danger of immortality or anything like it. I went to sleep despondently in the great green building, and when I awoke I was in this mental institution instead of *either* the future or the hospital. And I wasn't in either Hymorell's body or my own — *I was in somebody else's!*

THERE was a male attendant nearby, cleaning up around the bed. I knew better than to ask where and who I was; I had to get oriented first, on my own, without arousing comment or getting into whatever kind of trouble Hymorell might have cooked up for me. So I just lay there, watching the attendant.

But he turned around and saw my eyes on him. He gave a start, began approaching the bed, then abruptly ducked out. He came back a little later with a doctor, who lifted my lids and stared at the pupils, tried my reflexer and finally stood erect, his arms folded grimly while he stared at me.

"What's your name?" he asked.

I didn't answer.

"Do you know where you are?"

"In a hospital," I said.

"Remember how you got here?"

As a matter of fact, I wasn't sure at all. Until I was, I had no intention of talking. That didn't stop them from putting me through a whole series of tests. By the time they finished, I realized why my silence hadn't accomplished anything.

Hymorell had transferred me to the body of a feebleminded man named Stephen Dallboy. When the male attendant had turned and seen the light of intelligence in Dallboy's eyes, it hadn't mattered whether I spoke or not, and the tests had amazed the doctors because, not knowing the situation, I had given normal responses. All except my name.

I don't altogether understand how Hymorell worked the stunt. He must have been as tired as I was of the dangerous game we'd been playing. The way I see it, he probably built another transference machine and used it to locate some accessible body in the present. That would be easy — just think of the number of patients in mental institutions he had to choose from! He happened to pick this Stephen Dallboy, a congenital imbecile, transferred me into that body, and presumably transferred himself back into his own in the future.

Then what had happened to my body? Stephen Dallboy must be in it, naturally. Being feebleminded, he wouldn't even try to work the apparatus, and I was

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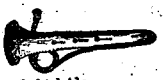
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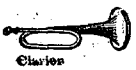
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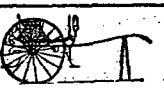
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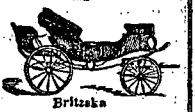
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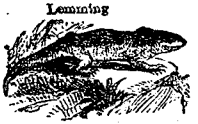
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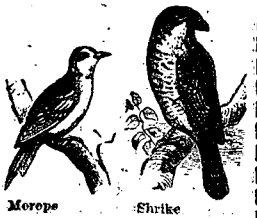
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confined to the asylum, unable to get to the machine.

It was a shrewd solution, taking me completely away from the transfer instrument but it got me sore. He could have transferred me into a body that wasn't under confinement, couldn't he? More important, though, Dallboy was a charity case, whereas I'd inherited money — not much, but enough to make a difference — and I would need it if I could ever get out of the institution.

I wrote a letter, signing it Stephen Dallboy, and asked about Terry Molton, whom I claimed as an acquaintance. The male attendant mailed it for me; I'd counted on him as a possible ally and won his friendship by playing chess with him.

The answer came back from the hospital, stating that Terry Molton was dead. He had apparently electrocuted himself with some experimental radio apparatus. The resulting fuse had started a fire in the room, which had been discovered and put out before it could spread, but not in time to save Molton.

Well, what did that signify? The fire had been detected about three hours after I had awakened to find myself in this asylum. Did that mean Hymorell deliberately set the boobytrap to destroy the equipment and Dallboy along with it, so I or anybody else wouldn't be able to pull him back into the present . . . or was it Hymorell who died in my body while Dallboy, still imbecilic, was in Hymorell's in the future?

I decided it didn't make a damned bit of difference. Getting even with somebody who won't be born for maybe thousands of years makes no sense, especially for some poor guy to whom being alive or dead was the same thing. And my immediate situation is one hell of a lot more urgent.

If I pretend to be Stephen Dallboy, I am an imbecile committed to an asylum . . . and I can't get back my own money. If I claim to be Terry Molton, I can be proved insane . . . and I still can't collect my money. I don't know what to do, except convince the doctors here that I'm normal enough to be released.

That wouldn't be so bad, come to thing of it, money or no money. I at least have all the parts of a passable body now. And I ought to be able to use this body profitably in the kind of world I understand. So I've gained a lot more than I lost.

Nevertheless, I *am* Terry Molton.

DALLBOY'S, as you will realize, is a well integrated hallucination, but if there is nothing more serious we shall undoubtedly have to release the patient

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in due course, as we see fit.

However, we do feel that we should acquaint you with one or two discrepant points. One is that, although the two men appear never to have met, Stephen Dallboy is informed in remarkably intimate detail of Terence Molton's affairs. Another is that, when confronted for test purposes with two friends of Molton's, he immediately addressed them by name and seemed to know all about them — to their great astonishment, for they have never to their knowledge met him before. Also, they state he does not in the least resemble Terence Molton.

Nevertheless, you will find herewith full legal proof that the patient is indeed Stephen Dallboy. Should there be any further developments, we will keep you advised.

Yours truly,
Jesse K. Johnson
(Medical Director)
—JOHN WYNDHAM

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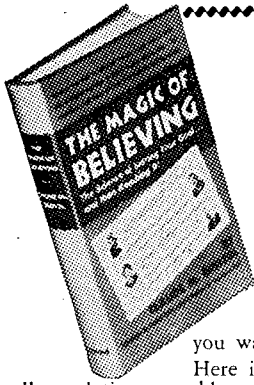

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